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JOHN McCORMACK
THE STORY OF A SINGER



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John Comack

John



John Comack.

John McCormack

THE STORY OF A SINGER

BY L. A. G. STRONG

With Sixteen Plates

New York · The Macmillan Company · 1941

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TO

LILY

FROM TWO ADMIRERS:

OR, AS ONE OF THEM PUTS IT,
TO THE IDEAL WIFE OF A TENOR
(I married Her)

FOREWORD

A WORD as to how this book came to be written. I had heard the name of John McCormack in Dublin before 1910, the year when I saw his name and portrait on a poster issued by the Gramophone Company. In some prophetic way, this poster struck my imagination. When, in 1912, I first heard records of him, the blow went deeper. The first record I ever bought was his, and by the time I first heard him sing, at the Queen's Hall in 1924, I possessed dozens, including some of the earliest Odeons, described on pages 48, 49, 77, and 78.

To-day I have over 160 of his records. I am by no means a blind admirer, and I can take no interest whatever in a great deal that he has sung, but he is to me incomparably the finest of lyric tenors, and the perfect interpreter of Irish music.

Thus, after I had written a life of Tom Moore, it seemed appropriate that I should write of the Irishman who most resembles him. The more I know of John, the stronger that resemblance, physical and spiritual, appears. That the book upon Moore brought me John's acquaintance and friendship was another pointer. Then, quite unexpectedly, at his suggestion, the opportunity arose.

In form and substance, this book is a collaboration. My hope is to draw a portrait of the artist and the man: singer, patriot, musician, talker, mimic, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, an Irishman with a rough side to his tongue as well as a smooth, and with vitality enough to make enemies

as well as friends. To this end I have wherever possible let him speak in his own words. The audiences that flocked to him all over the world came to hear his voice, and they shall hear it often in these pages. I provide the recitative; he sings the aria.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I HAVE to thank a number of people for their kind and valuable help, the more so as the subject of this study is not at his best with dates and other such tiresome exactitudes. Foremost among the helpers is Mr. Ronald Phillips, who has supplied most of the data in the two appendices, and been patient with all my queries. To Countess McCormack I owe a number of picturesque details and help of every kind. I must also thank particularly Miss Mary Scott, Mr. Walter Legge of His Master's Voice and Covent Garden, Mr. Bernard Brophy, Mrs. Eva Metman, various relations of the subject, and my wife.

L. A. G. S.

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JOHN McCORMACK

THE STORY OF A SINGER

CHAPTER I

IN SOME OF the country parts of Ireland you will find no signposts. If a stranger remonstrates, the people stare at him in surprise.

'Sure, why should we want a signpost?' they ask him.
'Don't we know the way?'

A similar difficulty stands in the way of anyone who tries to write an Irishman's life. His contemporaries imagine that what is so well known to them must be known to all. They offer no signposts. And there are other difficulties. The Irish look on biography as an art, and, once they take it up, practise it for its own sweet sake. I do not refer to the professional biographers, who, oddly enough, incline to austerity; but to the ordinary public, the amateurs.

These go to it with a will, presenting the seeker after truth with a profusion of circumstantial detail. This detail will be magnificently true to character—at least, to the view they have decided to take—but it will not be hampered by regard for fact. And the view they take may be governed by another peculiarity of the national genius. If he has been to school with a man, or drunk a pint with him, the average Irishman refuses to be impressed by anything the man may do thereafter. Fame won outside Ireland is particularly dangerous. The Irish will accept it at first, and take credit for it; but as soon as the subject becomes public property, they turn their talents to depreciation.

So, whatever sources he may draw on, the optimist who sets out to write the life of a famous Irishman is unlikely

to get much help from his subject's contemporaries. It has been sad to find how many of the stories told about John McCormack arise from the amiable national characteristics noted above. Each was *ben trovato*: none was true.

II

The finest tenor that ever came out of Ireland was born at Athlone, on the banks of the Shannon, and received the names of John Francis. The date of his birth was June 14th, 1884. Later, there was a dispute in the family, his father insisting that the month was not June but July. Mrs. McCormack retorted that she knew June was the month, because she was present when the event occurred.

John Francis was the fourth of eleven children. His father and mother were both born in Scotland, in the Lowland town of Galashiels. His grandfather on his father's side was a Sligo man; his mother's family are Scots. Of the whole family, John is the only one who never showed a single Scottish characteristic. Indeed, there are one or two he has reason to covet.

His mother gave him humour, gentleness, and charm. A look of half-bewildered melancholy, simple, almost child-like, which is visible in several of the early portraits, and which still settles upon his face when he is tired, smoothing out the lines and making him seem young and vulnerable, is her legacy also. From his father he inherited energy, drive, and ambition.

'If I had your education and your chances,' Andrew McCormack would declare, 'I would be Prime Minister of England.'

The father had a good singing voice. Indeed, various

elders have since discovered that, when he was a young man, it was better than John's. But this may have come from a wish to keep the son in his place, or else it was just the Irish way, for John's mother always shook her head at it. At any rate, Andrew sang more than well, and helped the boy to sing and to love singing.

What part inheritance had in equipping the singer is hard to determine. An exceptional gift has always something capricious about it: it lights as suddenly and irresponsibly as a butterfly, often on a place where there seems little to attract it. In John's case it chose soundly, and the physical endowment was bestowed in a place where there was much to help it. He himself feels that his love for the folk-music of all peoples is as much a gift from his Scottish blood as from his Irish. The same applies to his natural aptitude for phrasing these folk-songs. Yet there has never been an instant's doubt that he is Irish of the Irish.

When the child was three, his father one morning put him on his back and took him to school to the Marist Brothers in Athlone. From there he won a scholarship to Sligo College, and went off in 1896 to study under Dr. Kielty, the beloved President of the college. John had done well to win the scholarship, and he went on doing well at his new school. He was intelligent and quick witted, and, apart from the ordinary school subjects, he attracted attention by his voice and by his natural powers as a mimic. He sang in the choir, and was soon promoted to sing solos on feast days and at the concerts held to celebrate the annual prize giving. His treble voice was good, but not exceptional.

His début as an actor was not entirely fortunate, though it gave great satisfaction to the audience. Cast as Lieutenant Molyneux in that well-exercised melodrama *Conn, the Shaughraun*, he was wrought to such a pitch of nervous tension that his most dramatic line came out in a novel form.

'Stop!' cries the Lieutenant. 'If you put your head outside that door, I'll put a bullet in it!'

Cried John, 'Stop! If you put your bullet outside that door, I'll put a head on it!'

And Father Kielty led the laughter that followed.

The little incident is interesting as well as funny. I think the memory burned itself very deep into the singer's mind, or the slip represented a tendency that was part of his psychological make-up; for he has always been apt to vary the words of his songs, and for many years never trusted his memory on the concert platform, keeping always a little book in which the words were written. Even this has not saved him from occasional mistakes, one or two of which have found their way into his records.

III

Sligo brought John on fast. It was a spartan life, and played its part in fitting him with the constitution that a singer needs. Up in the morning at six, even in winter, with no heating in the dormitory; the hours long, the work hard, the food plain: it was no nursery for a weakling, and John, though thin as a rail, grew tough and strong. He continued to make good progress, and was well liked both by staff and boys, with whom his liveliness and powers as a mimic made him very popular.

When he came home for the holidays, John took a more dominant part in the family sing-songs. The McCormacks loved to sing, and would gather round the piano on all occasions. Up till then, none of his relations had thought that his gifts were anything out of the ordinary. Indeed, for some years still, they would profess not to understand 'all the fuss that was made of John's voice.'

But now, with the fresh confidence which school gave him, John would sit down and reel off the latest songs, everything he had heard during the term, and compel their attention, whether they liked it or not.

Whatever John's family might think, one man at Sligo had ideas about the boy, and was prepared to back them.

IV

'Oh, John! I have permission from the President. You may sing for me at the Town Hall to-morrow night and Thursday, and I will give you five shillings for the two concerts. What will you sing?'

That was John's introduction to the concert platform.

'Oh, Mr. John! Why did you have to show off your learning an' education at the Town Hall last night? Why didn't you sing your songs in English?'

That was John's first experience of musical criticism. He *had* sung his songs in English.

It came about in this way. During the winter of 1900 Father Hynes, a beloved Professor at Sligo College, who was later to become President of University College, Galway, was organizing a concert in the Town Hall for one of his favourite charities. All the famous singers in Sligo were to sing, and there were many of them.

It was at this concert he invited the boy to sing. The effect only John can describe.

'For all the rest of that day I hardly heard a word that was said to me. I went to bed and dreamed of perfect dress suits with red silk handkerchiefs tucked in the waistcoat, of mustachios royally upcurled, and of long hair oiled and brushed back from Olympian foreheads. I dreamed of ovations, of doves being let down in a basket from the top of

the proscenium arch to flutter and coo at my feet. I dreamed of horses being taken from between the shafts of my carriage by wildly cheering multitudes. I dreamed and dreamed, until I heard that rude awakener and summoner to mundane things—the six o'clock bell in the morning—bringing me back to earth with a bump.'

The great evening came, and John, though nervous as a kitten, sang well enough, and held his own with the professionals. It was not till next day he received the salutary criticism quoted above.

This first appearance, and that criticism, were the basis of his whole career.

'Every fee I have ever received since then is simply an accumulation at compound interest of that original fee,' he said. Then, reaching sideways and tapping me impressively on the knee, 'Sure we can't climb Parnassus if we don't know where it is. If our feet are not placed upon the mountain path, how can we reach the top? An aeroplane may soar over it, but it can't land there—even by accident. Go on,' he added quickly, 'tell me that's irrelevant. But at least *I* know what *I* mean.'

And the criticism, showing him the necessity to get his words across to the audience, was the first step towards the making of a diction that has never been surpassed: a diction so perfect that it could get the patter-swift words of the liveliest folk-song *pianissimo* to the back of the gallery at the Albert Hall.

v

The two years that followed were more academic than musical. His ambition now strongly kindled, John pleaded for extra time to give to his music. Dr. Kielty had other views. He had marked the boy's strong religious sense, and

this, coupled with his quickness at his books, led him to hope that John would be a priest. So, to every request, he replied with a gentleness that disarmed protest.

'My boy,' he said, 'study your Latin. That will be much more important for you in your future.'

It was important, though not quite in the way the good Father hoped: for, when John went to Italy, it enabled him to get a working knowledge of Italian in six weeks.

So the last two years at Sligo went their way in a round of examinations. John did well in all of them. In 1902 he left the college, full of gratitude to it and to the staff for all their care.

Back at Athlone, he sat down to discuss with his father what career he should follow. A university education was impossible; there was not enough money. All things considered, it seemed best to enter for one of the scholarships offered by the Dublin College of Science.

John put his name down, and was just setting himself to work seriously for the examination, when Providence took a hand, and he was invited to sing at a charity bazaar in Athlone. The people who heard him, including the professional singers appearing at the concert, offered the boy every sort of encouragement, and told him the career of a singer was the only one he should think of.

This encouragement blew to a blaze the ambitions damped down at Sligo. Once again John's mind ran to nothing but music. His father intervened with stern admonitions to study, and John did his best to obey, but his thoughts were on musical scores instead of text-books, and the quick wits fostered at Sligo did not get a fair chance. When the result of the examination appeared, there were written up the names of thirteen scholars. Next in line was John's name. He had missed his scholarship by one place.

'I've often wondered,' he says, 'what would have happened to me if my name had appeared thirteenth instead

of fourteenth. Is thirteen unlucky or lucky for me? I'm not sure, but I can make a damn good guess.'

At any rate, he had failed to get his scholarship, and there he was, at the ripe age of eighteen, alone in Dublin. Something had to be done.

Various friends from Sligo, of his own age, were in Dublin too, studying for the Civil Service. Long consultations were held, and John finally decided to join his friends and study for the Civil Service examinations of 1903. Accordingly, he settled down to work, making his goal a second division clerkship.

John worked, and worked hard, but he never took the examination.

'God in His infinite Providence had evidently given me music as my vocation.'

That being so, the necessary instruments of Providence were soon forthcoming. During that winter John met two men who helped to shape his career, and to whom he will always be grateful. Frank Manning, a very skilful player on the mandolin, had heard him sing and was a great admirer of his voice.

'I tell you who you must meet,' said Manning. 'You must meet Vincent O'Brien. He would be apt to do you a lot of good.'

Manning made the introduction, and O'Brien, already a figure of power in the Dublin musical world, realized at once that here was a voice of unusual quality. He set to, and gave the boy the first singing lessons he had ever had.

Nothing responds so quickly to skilled attention and to practice as the singing voice. In a few months John had so far improved that, helped also by the generosity of Dr. Dudley Forde, he entered for the tenor class at the *Feis Ceoil*, the national musical festival in Dublin. The first prize was a gold medal, awarded each year by Luigi Denza, the composer, who acted as adjudicator.

There were fourteen tenors entered for the competition. John was the fourteenth. Each had to sing the test piece, followed by a song of his own choosing. The test piece was 'Tell Fair Irene,' from Handel's *Atalanta*: an aria of such difficulty that not for close on twenty years did John again venture to sing it in public. It requires considerable agility, and in one place has a run of ten bars. After hearing thirteen versions of this aria, the audience may well have been sick of it, but John was in no state to worry about them. In the grip of a nervousness that would hardly let him know what he was doing, with his throat hurting, his heart pounding, and his knees shaking, he somehow got on the platform.

Then something happened which eased the strain. The accompanist was a tall thin young man with hair as black as a crow's wing. His name was Hamilton Harty. He gave the fourteenth singer a friendly nod, and played the opening bars.

An exclamation from the singer stopped him.

'Sure,' protested John. 'That's too fast. I can't sing it at that pace.'

The accompanist swung round on the music stool, and took a good look. He smiled.

'Very well,' he said. 'Show me how you like it.'

So John, taking his own time, sang the aria. After that, his own choice was easy. Feeling much better, he followed up with the old Irish melody 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl.'

As soon as he had finished, there was a moment of silence, then prolonged applause. Signor Denza rose to give his adjudication. He beamed upon the audience.

'You have shown by your applause,' he said, 'that you have made my decision for me, and you are quite right. The winner is the young man whom you have just heard.'

This time the number fourteen was not unlucky.

Two other facts are worth mentioning about that *Feis*.

In the soprano class, the adjudicator, the well-known bass singer Denis O'Sullivan, awarded the first prize to one Miss Lily Foley, of whom more presently. And in the class for basses, one of the competitors, though he did not win the medal, was to be heard of again. His name was James Joyce.

vi

Soon after this John received his first out-and-out professional engagement.

'I wonder,' said Father O'Reilly, the organizer of the concert. 'Would you like to sing for me at Blackrock? I haven't much money to offer you, I'm afraid: only three guineas.'

Only three guineas! To a boy of nineteen, whose first fee had been five shillings, it was riches. John accepted eagerly, and contributed two items to a programme consisting of twenty. In the first part, Mr. J. F. McCormick (*sic*), after whose name was added in brackets '*Feis Gold Medallist*,' sang 'The Irish Emigrant.' To the second part Mr. J. F. McCormack, having recovered his true identity, contributed 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl.' Many of the other items were in Erse: the star was an opera singer named Miss Lily O'Dempsey, and during the interval a short address on St. Patrick was delivered by Mr. Eamonn O'Neill. It was that sort of concert.

vii

Concert engagements now began to flow in, giving the young tenor that confidence in his voice which only platform experience can bring. He began to realize that one

might feel like death and yet not die. One might be breathless with fright, one's voice might shrink to a whisper, one might be sure that in two minutes one was going to be the most abject and humiliating failure: yet, somehow, stuck up there in front of all the faces, one found a breath, one found a voice—one got through.

And the voice itself grew better. The lessons he was still getting from Vincent O'Brien were doing him a power of good. That wise musician understood his voice and did nothing to coarsen or in any way to interfere with the quality which his prophetic ear had caught.

And John was learning much from listening to other singers. There were good singers to be heard in Dublin in the years 1903 and 1904. Of the native singers, the king and queen were William Ludwig and Agnes Treacy. Ludwig, one of the finest baritones Ireland ever produced, was soon to do John an inestimable service. Barton McGuckin the tenor was past his prime, but the baritone J. C. Doyle was making a name for himself, and Percy Whitehead's polished and sympathetic singing was beginning to attract attention. Besides the native singers, there were visits from the Carl Rosa and Moody-Manners Opera Companies, and John heard several performances that impressed themselves deeply on his memory. So far he had never been drawn to opera, looking on it chiefly as a storehouse for arias which every tenor loved to sing. It was a performance of *Tannhäuser* under Julius Walther that first opened his eyes to opera as an art form—and, at once, since the artist is inescapably an egotist, to the possibilities it had to offer him.

From that moment he began to study the performances of the various operatic tenors as interpretations of the part, rather than as a series of arias well or indifferently sung. The judgments of a singer on other singers are always interesting. They have not always a musical value, but the technical knowledge behind them, the instant understand-

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ing of what the singer has to contend with, give them a peculiar interest. John is a severe judge; generously responsive, catholic in his appreciation, merciless to the second rate, instantly appreciative of first-class work in any category. I therefore am giving throughout any judgment he utters on famous singers that is not too vigorously phrased.

Of these early performances in Dublin, three stand out, and are still vivid to him after close on forty years. These were Philip Brozel in *Pagliacci*, 'the best Canio I ever heard'; the Don José of Joseph O'Mara, 'the finest dramatic rendering of the part in all my memory'; and the Faust of Edward Davies.

'There was a tenor for you,' John exclaimed. 'Teddy Davies at that time had the sweetest, the most natural and easy tenor voice I have ever heard.'¹

Irish voices are naturally sweet and sympathetic in quality, but the tenors tend to be nasal, high-pitched, and thin at the top. Thus the singers from outside, particularly in opera, were an excellent corrective. No one with John's instinct for singing could hear the open ringing tone of a good tenor without registering in his mind a quality at which to aim—a quality the native tenor often lacked.

VIII

John's début was made at an exciting time. These first

¹ Two of these verdicts are of great interest to me personally. Brozel I never heard, though my father, a good judge, heard him and has spoken often of him. I heard O'Mara in *Carmen* very late in his career. His voice was thin, and he had to take the climax of 'The Flower Song' falsetto, but his singing was vigorous and dramatic, and his acting magnificent. Edward Davies I heard as Faust somewhere about 1914, with an exceptionally sweet-voiced Margherita, by name Dorothy Moulton. His singing was easy and his stage-craft excellent, but the voice had by then lost its best quality.

days of the new century saw the rise of the Irish literary movement. An intense national consciousness had come upon the city, as it realized, first with bewilderment, then with a rush of deep, long-buried feelings, that a new life was stirring. Dublin, long despised, long regarded as a degenerate provincial city, had given birth to something fresh and strong that was all its own. Characteristically, Dublin was apt to jeer at first. It could not believe its own good fortune. It had to dissemble its emotion. But the emotion was there. The rush of national feeling helped all artists, and must have helped John too, though not directly. The great men had no time for singers. Only one of them understood the art of singing—and he did not help John.

It has been said more than once that John owed his start in Dublin to that saint of the Abbey Theatre movement, Edward Martyn, who plays so large a part in George Moore's trilogy. Martyn was an enthusiast for choral singing, which he loved with the force of a rare character, and his judgment was held in high regard. This love of his, by the way, was seized upon by the ingenious Moore, who never rested till he had either found a weakness in those whom he admired, or, if he could not find a weakness, till he had discredited one of their virtues.

Aware of this trait, the élite of Dublin shrank from Moore's admiration, being apprehensive of its inevitable sequel. For a time all Moore's regard was concentrated on A. E., whom he hymned as a saint. Then came the reaction. 'I *must* find a flaw in that perfect soul,' he went about repeating; but he got no help, even in Dublin, and was reduced at last to fasten upon the devotion between A. E. and his secretary, and allege that the poet was neglecting his wife.

A. E., learning that this was to go into the next chapter of the trilogy, trotted off and obtained an injunction, leav-

ing Moore to complain bitterly of his selfishness, and transfer his admiration to Edward Martyn.

Martyn one day met W. B. Yeats, and spoke of Moore.

'I can't see why you are all so afraid of what Moore will write about you in his book,' he said. 'Now, I don't mind what he says about me.'

Yeats looked sideways at him with a sharp glint of amusement.

'Yes, but, Edward, do you know what he *is* going to say about you?'

Martyn beamed. 'I don't know, and I don't care.'

'I think you will, Edward, when you hear what it is.'

'Not I. He can say what he likes.'

'Edward—do you know what he is saying? He is saying that it is not choral singing you like, but choirboys.'

Martyn leaped up, transfigured with rage.

'The blackguard! The scoundrel! I'll have the law on him!'

No charge could have been more baseless: but Moore's infinite malice had found its target, threatening to asperse the purest of Martyn's passions, his love of music.

It would be pleasant to record that this lovable and human character, this patron saint of choral singing, helped the young Irish tenor and did his best for him. In plain fact, he hindered.

Soon after his débüt, John had a shot at the pro-cathedral choir. It meant only £25 a year, but that was a lot to the boy whose first fee had been five shillings.

Before Vincent O'Brien and Edward Martyn, John sang his song—choosing 'When Other Lips,' from *The Bohemian Girl*.

When he had finished, O'Brien raised his eyebrows enquiringly at Martyn. 'Dear Edward' shook his head.

'No good,' he said. 'His voice is too strong.'

It was an odd verdict upon a voice that was never not-

able for volume, but, such was Martyn's prestige, it held, and John did not get his £25 a year.

Long afterwards, when the singer was famous, he laughingly mentioned this incident in an interview: whereon Martyn wrote to the papers and repudiated it. He added that John's was always a small voice, and he had never been able to see why so much fuss was made of it.

Of his sincerity there can be no question. We can only conclude that his memory was at fault.

IX

The audience at the *Feis* was, as always, a special audience. Intellectual Dublin was not represented, any more than it was at small occasional concerts. John's introduction to the élite was made when he first sang at the Bohemian Club.

Before he came on, a young man got up to recite. The young man had just been elected to Parliament for Belfast. The piece he chose was entitled 'Sentenced to Death.' The young man announced it as 'Santanced ta Dath.' His name was Joe Devlin.

John, when he sang, was quite well received. The élite were pleased, but there was no excitement. For some time, only a very few, even among judges of singing, realized the exceptional promise of his voice.

CHAPTER 2

ONE DAY John received an invitation to sing at his home town, Athlone. His natural nervousness fought with an equally natural desire to show the folk at home what he could do. Then came a piece of sheer bad luck. He caught a heavy cold, and for a few days it seemed that he would have to cry off. But the cold cleared away, the voice came back, and, though it was none too happy, it was not bad enough to warrant cancelling the engagement.

Colds are the bane of a singer's life. If ever a medical genius arises who can cure them, the legion of those who live by their voice will praise him above all human benefactors. There are skilled doctors who can patch up a singer's voice, who stand in the wings with spray and paint and somehow make it last him through the evening. But there is always a price to pay, in the form of a longer period of disablement afterwards; and the hideous anxiety of wondering whether one's voice will last the evening, and how far one may trust it, only the singer knows.

And only the singer knows that horrible dilemma which a cold brings. Which is worse—to appear, to be heard at less than one's best, and risk giving the audience a bad impression? Or to cancel the date, disappoint audience and organizers, and perhaps never be offered the engagement again?

It is a cruel choice. On the one hand, nothing does an artist more harm than to be considered chancy.

'Oh! don't book him. He let us down two years ago,

and he didn't turn up at Oldham last Christmas either.'

The singer's imagination is quick to hear this, and balance it against another utterance, just as damaging.

'What on earth are you booking him for? I heard him at Liverpool, and he was rotten.'

To apologize to an audience, to say he has a cold, may win the singer indulgence for the moment; but the chances are that the audience, and, worse, the organizers of the concert, will remember him only as a man who sang badly because he had a cold.

Besides, there is the money side of the question. Very often a singer simply cannot afford to forgo an engagement. He must be there, and do the best he can, knowing all the time that he is singing far below his true form, and doing his voice no good. Once his fame is made, he may be able to afford to nurse his voice, and to sing only when he is fit. Until then, he sings as long as he has a croak left in him.

So, Madame Schumann-Heink sang as one of the Rhine maidens, suspended in the air by a belt round her middle, a few days after bearing a child. She had to have the money. Though not in want, Madame Marchesi, to save a performance and oblige a distraught impresario, rose from her bed—she had influenza, and her temperature was 102—and sang a long and exacting rôle, not only finding a voice, but braving all the draughts and chills of an opera house in winter. But singers are a tough race, and neither heroine was the worse.

Singers, like actors, will do anything rather than disappoint their public. Madame Blanche Marchesi, daughter of the altruist just mentioned, tripped and fell full length on her face a few seconds before she had to sing at a concert in London. The orchestra was waiting, the conductor ready to hand her on to the platform. Delay was impossible. Shaken, in severe pain, hardly able to see, she emerged

smiling and, aided by the special power which comes to singers in their distress, got through her aria.

I remember a concert which was to have been given by two artists, the tenor Tom Burke, and a violinist. The audience was of the type that attends celebrity concerts in the provinces. They had come to hear the singer, and were prepared to sit through the intervals provided by the violinist, or even to enjoy them mildly, if they were spectacular or recognizably melodious. Thus they were not at all pleased when they heard that the tenor was suffering from a sudden and severe attack of 'flu.

The situation was unpleasant for both artists. Tom Burke was never one to spare himself. Three times he came on, shivering in high fever, and tried to sing, before giving up the attempt as hopeless. It is pleasant to record that, so courageously and skilfully did the violinist meet the occasion, the audience applauded him enthusiastically, and, instead of enduring, asked for more. The violinist was Yovanovitch Bratza.

II

So it was with low spirits that John, a big muffler round his throat, stood on the smoky platform of the Broadstone in Dublin, waiting for his train. This station exists no longer, and, despite the sentimental memories which it evokes in the breasts of Dubliners, it is no loss. It was hard to get at, small, dirty, noisy, draughty, and cold. The airs that racked it were of an unholy colour, imparting to porters and passengers alike an appearance of having dwelt for a long time in a cellar and fed upon toadstools. John seemed forlorn indeed, a thin, frail-looking boy, his natural pallor rendered ghastly by his surroundings, with large

mournful eyes, and that droop at the corners of his mouth which has made many a heart beat, maternally and otherwise.

As he stood, in the midst of the smoke, the clatter, and the bawling, he felt a kindly hand on his shoulder, and turned to see the baritone William Ludwig.

'Hullo, John,' Ludwig greeted him. 'I want to introduce you to a very charming artist, Miss Lily Foley, who is singing in the concert with you. Why, John—whatever have you been doing to yourself? You want someone to take care of you, that's what you want. And I'm sure Miss Foley here is the very young lady to do it.'

John saw a small and pretty girl, dark haired, slight, even younger than himself. She smiled shyly. He grasped her hand, and the two stood like children, silent, blushing. The baritone, with a benevolent smile, turned away and left them to do their best for each other.

The concert went reasonably well, as far as John was concerned. Looking through his press notices, I have been struck by the fact that throughout his whole career, whenever he had to ask an audience's indulgence for the fact that he had a cold, the critics record that he sang particularly well. Even so, John seems to have little professional affection for Athlone. The town never helped him in his career, and, on his farewell tour of Ireland, although he visited some quite small towns, he did not sing in Athlone.

But something had come along of even greater interest than an ambitious boy's desire to shine in his home town. Though he did not at first realize the nature of the attraction, John was much drawn to the girl he had met on the platform of the Broadstone. Not only was she exceedingly pretty, not only had she a clear sympathetic voice and used it well; but there was a grace, a warmth of real friendliness about her, that drew from him an immediate response.

The two met often after this, at concerts and parties,

but these were the only times they did meet; for, at seventeen, Lily was still at school.

III

Then Lily, professionally speaking, stole a march on John. She was booked one night to sing at the Celtic Literary Society in Stephen's Green. In the audience was a man named Riordan, who had come over from America to engage singers for the Irish Village at the St. Louis Fair. He heard Lily sing, was charmed by her voice and presence, and came round afterwards to see her.

Riordan was tall and distinguished looking, and must have made an impression on any girl of seventeen. He congratulated Lily on her voice, and then struck her breathless by suddenly asking her to go over to St. Louis for the duration of the Fair, at a fee of ten pounds per week and all expenses found.

The girl rushed home, delirious with excitement, and told her parents. They looked at each other, pursed up their lips, and shook their heads. All the way to America, at her age? Who was this Mr. Riordan? Lily's rhapsodies about his appearance did nothing to ease their minds. Their anxiety was natural enough, being after the manner of parents everywhere, and particularly after the manner of Irish parents in the year 1904.

But Lily, small though she was, had a will of her own. When she was set on a thing, she got it. She gave her parents no peace, and at last they consented, reluctantly, on condition that Lily's sister went too.

John was well pleased to hear of her success, as were her many friends. A complimentary concert was arranged

for her, to celebrate the event and give her a send-off. John was asked to sing at this, and of course consented.

For him, the concert was marred by a small and rather absurd incident. He was on the platform, in the middle of Sir Arthur Sullivan's then popular ballad 'Once Again.' At the beginning of the second verse occur the words 'And back my memory slips.' The suggestion was too strong. Back John's memory slipped, his mind became a blank, and he stood there mouthing helplessly, like a gold-fish. Fortunately, someone in the front row gave him his line, and he was able to finish.

So Lily went off amid applause and good wishes. John was so genuinely modest, despite his ambition, that he never so much as thought of the possibility that he might be asked to go too. But a kind angel was looking after his affairs. One day, some time after Lily's engagement, he was introduced to Mr. Riordan.

'Well, Mr. McCormack. Tell me now—would you like to come to America?'

Oddly enough, though he knew Lily had been asked, John had not heard about Mr. Riordan, and the question at first conveyed nothing to him. He looked at the tall stranger, wondering what the catch was. Then, suddenly, a mad hope leaped in his heart.

'I would like to go anywhere,' he said, in as offhand a manner as he could manage.

Riordan smiled. 'I am perfectly serious,' he said. 'I am engaging Irish artists for the Irish Village at the St. Louis Exposition.'

He went on to mention the artists he had already engaged. John was only interested in one of the names. A contract giving him ten pounds a week and a return ticket to St. Louis, Missouri, left him no thought for anybody else. It seemed to him the realization of all his dreams. No other engagement in his whole life gave him the same thrill.

So it came about that, four weeks after Lily had gone, John set sail from Queenstown for New York on the *Lucania*, taking with him many messages from the Foleys. He shakes his head ruefully at the memory.

'The voyage was a nightmare. I have crossed the Atlantic at least a hundred times since, and been round the world three times, but that trip on the *Lucania* is more vivid than all the rest together. From Sunday afternoon until Thursday I lay in my cabin, which I shared with three other bad sailors, sad, lonesome, sick, and miserable. I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep. Oh! how I pitied all poor men that had to go down to the sea in ships.'

New York was reached in fine weather, but, strange to say, though John has a good memory, he has no recollection at all of New York's marvellous skyline, which, even in those days, was supposed to dazzle the benighted traveller from Ireland and leave him breathless. His only vivid recollection of New York on this trip is the Flatiron Building on a very windy day.

'The ladies wore their skirts longer in those days,' he says. 'It was just as well!'

Then followed two nights in the train; and one can easily imagine what they meant to a boy who had never been out of Ireland. The train brought him to St. Louis early in the morning, tired, grubby, disillusioned. To freshen himself up, he went into a barber's shop near the station. The barber sized him up, and proceeded to give him 'the works.' When it was over, John asked for his bill.

Eyebrows were raised. 'You mean the check.'

'I would give you a cheque and welcome,' said John, 'only I have no bank account.'

At this the eyebrows went up still higher, and the assistants asked John if he had just come from the 'old country.' Resenting what he thought was a slur on his beloved Ireland, he told them his country was as young as theirs.

They did not argue the point, but handed over the check— 1 dollar 75 cents—seven shillings for a hair-cut, a shave, and the pat of a powder puff. John never got over the charge. It rankles still.

IV

Of his personal success at the Fair, John took the objective view that has always characterized him. He sang a group of three songs twice a day.

'I had the success one would expect to come to a boy of nineteen, no more, no less. My colleagues were everything Irish colleagues could be. One of them was that superb actor, from the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Dudley Digges, now so well known in America on stage and screen. Another is sitting by the fireside with our grandchild on her knee, warning me not to get sentimental. So, as I've always been, I hope, a patient and dutiful husband, I won't.'

The importance of the whole time at St. Louis, the thing that really mattered, was the growth of his friendship with Lily. For the next two months John escorted the sisters wherever they went. The pair had long since lost their shyness, and John poured out all his hopes and ambitions. Lily was an excellent listener and a wise one. William Ludwig had been perfectly right. She was the very one to look after him, and she did it in a friendly way, without fuss or possessiveness.

Even though the success which John obtained was only that which might be expected for a boy of nineteen, his voice and gifts produced a strong impression on the musical public at St. Louis. He made many friends, and they all

advised him that such a voice could be fully trained nowhere but in Italy.

This was a new idea to John, but he took to it readily enough. All his life he has had an instinct enabling him to recognize at once where his future lay. The moment a hint was given, the instinct said yes. Even though the project seemed madly improbable, he knew not only that he must make for it, but that it would come. Accordingly, he resolved that the first thing to see about, when he got home, was to provide the means to go to Italy and study.

He got home sooner than he expected. The Irish Village was not proving quite Irish enough for the citizens of St. Louis, and the organizers therefore took steps to bring it into line with their ideas. A stage act of the old-fashioned Oirish type was introduced, and John resented this so angrily that he resigned from the company.

Having resigned, he had no course but to return to Ireland. This meant leaving Lily. There was only one way to support such a parting, and, before he sailed, John and she were secretly engaged.

v

When John got home to Athlone—it was on the 8th of July—he found himself the white-headed boy indeed. Neighbours, friends, and acquaintances flocked in upon him, and he had to tell in detail every happening of his American travels. He never lacked the instinct of a good storyteller, and the story did not lose in the telling. To disappoint so eager an audience was impossible. They got what they wanted, yea, and more also. Nobody was by to spoil things, and a good time was had by all—including the hero.



MAESTRO SABATINI
SIGNORA SABATINI

The trip had brought professional prestige, and for the next two or three months John was singing busily in little concerts in Dublin and the provinces. Then, in October, came an invitation to go to London and make some records. He was to make ten phonograph cylinder records for a fee of fifty pounds, and it was followed by an offer from the Gramophone Company (*His Master's Voice*) to make ten disc records for the same amount.

John still has two of the H.M.V. records.¹ It has for years been his delight to play them to his musical friends. If they are connoisseurs of singing, so much the better.

'Listen now,' he will say. 'I've a boy here who wants my opinion as to whether he should take up singing as a career. Do you think he has a future?'

He plays the record. The friends look at one another. Poor old John, their looks say: he's losing his judgment. Then one clears his throat and speaks.

'Ah no, John. Don't advise that poor boy to study singing. It's too pathetic for words.'

Whereupon a Gargantuan bellow of laughter shakes the studio, and John tells them the truth.

Many excellent musicians have fallen for this trick, and no one has yet identified the singer.

With his hundred pounds in his pocket, in all the pride of wealth, John bought himself a stall at Covent Garden, to hear Caruso in *La Bohème*. That evening was a revelation. When Caruso reached the high C in '*Che gelida manina*,' the young singer bounded up in his seat; it was all he could do to restrain a cry of exultation.

'That voice still rings in my ears after thirty-six years. It was like no other voice in the world. The memory of its beauty will never die.'

The moment the opera was over, John, drunk with hero-worship, rushed round to the stage-door and waited there.

¹ I now have four; only one shows promise.

When presently Caruso came out, John contrived to bump into him. Each bowed and said ‘Scusi’—and John was able to go home and report that he had already had a conversation with Caruso.

Not so long afterwards, when the two were firm friends, John told Caruso of this incident, to the great man’s unbounded delight.

VI

As soon as he got back to Dublin, John set about providing the means to get to Italy. Hearing Caruso had been the last spark; he was aflame with eagerness. He told all his friends of his ambition, and they and the Dublin public rallied to his support. A series of concerts was given during the winter, John saved every penny he could lay hands on, and finally all arrangements were made that he should go to Milan in October of the following year, 1905, and study under the famous Maestro, Vincenzo Sabatini.

Meanwhile Lily had come home from St. Louis, and John was of course a frequent visitor to the house of her parents. She wholly approved and seconded his ambition to get the best training, even though it meant his leaving her for months at a time. This strong practical streak in her nature, this capacity to take the long view, has been of the greatest service to John throughout his whole career: a strong, effective backing for the inspiration she has given him. To an artist of his temperament, such a wife was invaluable. In fact—once more we have to say it—William Ludwig was right. John wanted someone to look after him, in all senses of the word.

The spring of 1905 was saddened for both by the death,

in March, of Lily's father. But the loss drew John more firmly than ever into the family. It gave him a new protective right. All now put their hopes on him and his career, and the added responsibility strengthened his manhood.

At last, in October, came the day that he must say good-bye and start for Italy. The question where he was to live had been anxiously debated and settled. Two maiden ladies of the name of Beethan ran a *pension* on the Via Brera. Their establishment had been highly recommended, and the McCormacks and Foleys in joint synod decided that John might safely be entrusted to its care. The ladies wrote that they would meet John at the station.

'But,' came the family chorus, 'they don't know you and you don't know them, so how in the wide earth are you to recognize each other?'

It was Lily, with her practical sense, who solved the problem. John was to write and tell the ladies that he would tie a white handkerchief round his right arm as he got off the train.

All went according to plan. The farewells were said, the journey made, and at last, shy, awkward, conscious of glances from his fellow-travellers, John tied on his white handkerchief and stepped out of the train.

'I felt like a kicker at a hunt,' he said, 'when they tie a red ribbon round its tail to warn you to keep clear of its heels.'

Fortunately for his feelings, he did not have to stand long on the platform with his white handkerchief. The two old English ladies bore down on him with welcoming smiles. Once more his trick of looking forlorn had proved a good friend to him. In any event, the Misses Beethan were charming and kind-hearted, and looked after him splendidly for the whole of his stay. He was not only comfortable but happy on the Via Brera.

It is good to hear him talk of those days.

'My guardian angel still watched over me,' he says. 'Maestro Vincenzo Sabatini was not only the perfect teacher. He was like a father to me for the whole time that I worked with him. He was patient, kindly, and conservative, the model of all a teacher should be.'

The language difficulty was made easy by the fact that Sabatini's wife was an Englishwoman, with the prosaic maiden name of Jelly. A singer herself, she had made a reputation as a coloratura soprano before her marriage.

The two had a famous son, Rafael Sabatini, the novelist, who inherited his mother's linguistic gifts, and could write equally well in several languages. Signora Sabatini played the accompaniments at her husband's lessons, and this was a great comfort to John.

VII

The day after he came, John had his first lesson. His meeting with Sabatini was a surprise. The famous teacher was thin and of medium height. Nothing about him suggested the musician. His clothes were severe and ordinary. He wore a stiff moustache. What hair he had was brushed up à la pompadour. 'He looked just like something you'd see in Whitehall, going into the War Office.'

As is the case with so many famous teachers, Sabatini's voice was not remarkable; but he was once principal tenor in the Opera at Oporto, and was very proud of the fact that he had been a fellow-student of the great Fancelli, who created the part of Radames in *Aïda*.

Sabatini's studio was small, no bigger than an ordinary drawing-room. It was severe and bare, and, as befits a singer's studio, full of light. On the piano stood a large

photograph of Sembrich, whom Sabatini never tired of extolling as the perfect singer. The ease and flexibility of a coloratura soprano were the ideal Sabatini set before his pupils; and any one who has heard the record John made, years afterwards, of '*Pur dickesti*', will realize that one pupil at any rate achieved it.

Into this studio, at precisely half-past two on the day after his arrival, came the Irish boy for his first lesson. He was, as usual, very nervous. What would the Maestro think of his voice? Would he think it bad, and send him home? Would he nod wearily, and take under his wing just another tenor? Not only John's ambition, but the loving anxiety of the home in Athlone, the good wishes and the money of those friends in Dublin—all hung on what he could do in the next few minutes.

Yet, underneath the nervousness, his determination gave him a desperate confidence. Deep inside him, the boy knew that he had the necessary powers. Most artists, even before their career is started, have an intuition that tells them what they are going to be. This now supported John and steadied his breathing. So, though he knew no word of Italian, he returned the Maestro's friendly smile, cleared his throat, and prepared to do his damnedest.

Signora Sabatini, well understanding, sat down and played a few arpeggios, and gave the beginner a 'Mi—mi—mi' or two, to set him at ease and loosen up his voice.

Then, his hand still shaking, John put on the piano the score of his chosen aria—'*Ah non credevi tu'* from *Mignon*—which he sang in English.

He could not tell how his voice sounded in the small studio, but he had the good sense to sing naturally and not to force it. Where many a beginner would have tried to show off his volume, John was shrewd enough to realize that it was the voice, and the voice alone, that could impress the Maestro.

The voice seemed to come easily enough. He finished the song, and stood, awaiting the verdict.

Sabatini nodded encouragingly, and at once set his pupil to some simple exercises. Not till he saw his wife after the lesson did he reveal his surprise and delight.

'I cannot place that young man's voice,' he said, with something like awe. 'God has placed it already.'

But the young singer had much to learn, and there began for him a routine which never altered. So long as he was under Sabatini, each day he had his midday meal at twelve, and at half-past two was in the studio, singing his exercises.

The standards set by Sabatini, and reverenced by his pupils, would appal the singers of to-day. The Maestro held up as example the great singers of the past, and the pupils modelled themselves upon these, never resting till they came as near as their gifts would take them to the same flexibility, the same ease, the same command.

For two to three months Sabatini kept John at these exercises, and would not let him touch an aria. To all the boy's pleadings to be allowed to break the monotony he returned the same answer, gentle but unyielding.

'Ah! *Giovanni, sei giovine, ma un giorno capirai!*' (Ah! John, you are young, but one day you will understand.)

'And,' says the singer, 'to that gentle soul I have often replied since: "*Si, Maestro, adesso capisco.*"' (Yes, Maestro, now I do understand.) To this day, I still sing the exercises he gave me, which I thought were such a bore.'

VIII

This must sound a strange language to the young singers of to-day, whose chief view of training is to ask how little

they need do in order to get to Covent Garden or the B.B.C. But that is how the artistes of a past generation worked. Karsavina's *Theatre Street*, Paderewski's memoirs, Caruso's story as told by his wife, Stanislavski's monumental books on acting, Chaliapin's life-story—these and a score of others testify to the incessant labour and application needed to perfect the craft of a great artist. Too many people still believe that the gift is all that matters.

I remember sitting in a railway carriage at Plymouth the day after Caruso died. A middle-aged lady was shown the news in the paper by one of her daughters.

'It's not fair,' she said. 'He was born with a voice, and all he had to do was open his mouth and sing.'

All! Caruso tells us that, despite all his hard work, at twenty-eight his voice was still so short that he could not reach the top notes of an aria Puccini wished him to sing. The composer, by making him bend double and lean the top of his head against the wall, at last got his voice far enough back in his head, and stretched it to include the notes required.

John needed no such gymnastic—God had placed his voice: but he had to work hard, and, being a good worker, he was obedient and followed everything the Maestro bade.

IX

Visits to the opera were an important part of the students' training. From their place in the gallery, they listened judiciously, praising or pulling to pieces the singers who had arrived.

With all the effrontery of youth, they criticized the tone production of the soprano, the phrasing of the tenor,

and the acting of the baritone, and thought how much better they could do it if only a poor misguided management would let them come down and show the way. After the opera, they would forgather in the *Galleria*, and, over a glass of Pilsner and a cold roast-beef sandwich, spend the night in passionate discussion of music, drama, and the vocal art.

'Them were the days, and we had our share of them!'

It is sad to relate that of all John's immediate circle of students, his fellow-pupils under Sabatini, not one achieved greatness. Still, they had their fun, and their lives have been the better for what they learned, and for those nights of argument and high endeavour.

During this first season, it was John's good fortune to see and hear some marvellous performances both in the opera house and in the theatre. The singing and acting of Rosina Storchio at the Scala is a memory that nothing can efface from his mind. It was a marvellous evening, held together by the conducting of Arturo Toscanini. Among the other singers John heard was the Spanish tenor Antonio Paoli, a bearded man with a powerful but unsteady voice, who prided himself on a supposed resemblance to the great Tamagno. He heard Fernando de Lucia, the tenor, an unrivalled singer of Neapolitan songs, little guessing that he was to meet him later. He heard the celebrated coloratura soprano, Celestina Boninsegna, with Emilio de Marchi, the first Cavaradossi. He heard Edoardo Garbin as Pinkerton to the Butterfly of Angela Pandolfini, daughter of the original Amonasro in *Aida*.

The students marvelled together at the paradox of Garbin's voice. They shook their heads over the snarl and 'whiteness' of his lower register, and gasped in admiration at the brilliant, open, ringing high notes that seemed to belong to another voice altogether. 'Them were the days.'

One evening John was invited by a couple of fellow-

students, in the first flush of their monthly allowances, to go with them to the Teatro Manzoni to see Eremeto Novelli in *Papa Lebonnard*.

'I can still feel myself being literally carried up the stairs by the crowd'—he says—'they would have to be a crowd of Carneras now!—and I can still see that wonderful actor in his great climax in the second act.'

No actor ever moved him so much, except Lewis Waller in *Monsieur Beaucaire* a short time after: but that is another story.

CHAPTER 3

THE YEAR 1906 was the turning point of John's career. A few weeks earlier, Sabatini had announced that his pupil would now be permitted to study his first aria. It was called '*Bella del tuo Sorriso*', from a long-forgotten opera named *Reginella* by Gaetano Braga, a composer now known entirely for his '*Angel's Serenade*'.

John worked hard at the aria, and one afternoon set out, with Signora Sabatini at the piano, to sing it for the Maestro. He put into it everything he had, and, as he was finishing, there walked into the studio a large, round-faced, massive man, obviously an old friend of the Maestro's. The two held an animated conversation in Italian, much too fast for John's unaccustomed ears to follow. When silence had fallen—'that's what it always sounds like, when two foreigners stop talking in a language one doesn't understand'—Signora Sabatini turned to John.

'Giovanni, would you like to make your début in *Amico Fritz* at Savona?'

John had never heard of *Amico Fritz*, nor had he the vaguest idea where Savona might be. All excitement and enthusiasm, he answered with the first Dublin phrase that sprang to his lips.

'Oh! Signora, would a duck swim?'

The lady translated this reply literally to her husband, who looked nonplussed, and said to her in puzzled accents that he could not see what a duck swimming had to do with John's making his début. But the matter was explained, and John accepted the engagement.

It was hardly remunerative. After studying the rôle, John was to spend two weeks in Savona rehearsing, and then sing ten performances of Mascagni's *Amico Fritz* for exactly nothing at all. As a special concession, he was to be given a *Serata d'Onore*—a sort of benefit night—on which he was to receive all the profits of the performance given in his honour. But no money considerations counted in his mind. Here at last he was to make his début, in Grand Opera, in Italy.

Before the performances could be billed, there was the question of choosing a name. McCormack was to Italian ears both unpronounceable and meaningless. They could never take seriously a singer with such a collection of consonants. The Sabatinis bent grave brows of consideration to the problem, but John had the answer. Lily's name would go splendidly into Italian, and there was the best possible precedent. The great bass, Signor Foli, who had won world fame in the latter part of the last century, was born at Waterford plain Foley. A double omen! So John made his Italian début as Giovanni Foli.

II

Savona is a little seaport town of some fifty thousand inhabitants, beautifully situated on the Gulf of Genoa. Many a moonlit night during his two months' stay the young singer sat by the edge of the sea, thinking of the history the waves could recount if they had tongues. He had every excuse for the thought, since the people are very proud of their city, and ask nothing better than to tell its story, at considerable length. John heard how the Carthaginians occupied it in 20 B.C., how the jealous Genoese ruined the harbour in the sixteenth century, and how Pope

Pius the Seventh lived there in 1809 as Napoleon's prisoner. He was shown the famous tomb of the parents of Pope Sixtus IV with the figures by Michele and Giovanni d'Aria di Como. With the singer's characteristic memory, he has forgotten what the tomb looked like, but remembers very well the beautiful sounding names of the artists. In the church of San Giovanni Battista, and close to the theatre, was a marvellous 'Adoration' by Dürer. John often stood in front of the picture, and it played a great part in developing that love of pictures which grew as he grew, and made him a collector of discernment.

The fortnight of rehearsal went pretty smoothly, though the singers were of very unequal merit, and John made his début in the Teatro Chiabrera on Saturday, January 13th, 1906.

As can be seen from the photograph taken at the time, he was scarcely the ideal *protagonista* in the opera.¹ Fritz is supposed to be about thirty-five years of age, whereas John was twenty-two and looked younger. Still, in opera the personal appearance of the singer is usually the last point to be considered; and it was a decided change to have a hero younger, slimmer, and better looking than he need be.

Altogether, the omens were favourable. As a general rule, Italian audiences are very kind to strangers. There was no pretending that John was an Italian, but he had adopted an Italian name, which was accounted to him for virtue.

He was very nervous, as always. At first sight, the name of Foli seemed a sort of alibi. What an Italian audience did to Giovanni Foli need not matter very much, once he got home, to J. F. McCormack. But there was not much comfort in this. On the other hand, there was a responsibility of not disgracing a name precious for two reasons.

¹ The photograph, alas, cannot be found.

The first performance went well enough, but the new tenor could not claim to have made any great sensation. However, the audience were kind, and as the evening went on John lost his nervousness and warmed up, so that, by the time he tackled the aria in the last act, he was fully master of himself, and in possession of the acute intelligence which has always been his safeguard as a singer.

The climax of the aria comes on a high B flat with the full orchestra blazing away under the voice. John's voice, never particularly strong, was, as may be imagined, small and immature then. He knew that he could never be heard over that orchestral mass and so, instead of attempting to sing the note, he opened his mouth as wide as he could, and struck a typical tenor's attitude. The audience, thinking they heard a beautiful B flat, applauded furiously, and insisted on his repeating the aria.

Unfortunately, that was the only occasion on which they demanded an encore. It was a pleasant lesson in humility, to be encored for a note he never sang.

John's press notices the next day expressed benign approval.

'The tenor, Giovanni Foli, made himself attentively listened to . . .' observed the local critic, and went on to say, 'he divested himself of the English phlegm so as to put on the artistic Italian habit.' It was perhaps a back-handed compliment, especially to an Irishman, but no doubt it was kindly meant. The critic also spoke of John's 'beautiful mellow voice.'

Presently came the benefit night. John approached it full of hope. It was as well he had a sense of humour, for, when the performance was over and the takings counted, he found that, far from getting anything, he owed the management a considerable sum. The one consolation was a song specially written by the composer Desconzi for him to sing on the occasion. The song was called

'Tornera.' Oddly enough, it was never published, though it was a graceful little song with the following pleasing words:

Di mi fanciulla, che fai li sulla porta
Si triste e sola, col freddo ad aspettare?
Che! tu non sai? . . . la mia mamma e morta,
E qui l'attendo . . . che deve ritornare
Povera fanciulla, ah! tu non sai
Che i morti da laggiu, non tornan mai?

Tornan gli augelli al nido in primavera,
Tornan le stelle in ciel, fatta la sera,
Tornano ai rami i fiorellini miei,
So tornan tutti, tornera anche Lei!

During the run of *Amico Fritz* John got a further chance, when the tenor engaged to sing in an opera called *La Cabrera* fell ill. The opera, by a young Frenchman named Dupont, had been awarded the Sonzogno Prize in Milan, the same prize that Mascagni won with *Cavalleria Rusticana*. It was a dull little opera, and made no impression. John only remembered it because he had to learn the tenor part in a week.

The season at Savona closed with a very good performance of another dull opera called *Siberia*, which met the reception its name would suggest.

III

It was good to get back to the studio and to the beloved Maestro, and to tell him in full detail everything that had happened. At Savona, with no one to help him by speaking English, John had perforce to get on with his Italian. Now, much to his surprise, he found himself able to tell Sabatini everything in his own language. The mas-

ter roared with laughter at the story of the high B flat which John had never sung.

'Giovanni,' he said with a wink, as soon as he had recovered, 'there are a good many tenors to whom I would like to teach that trick.'

Soon after his return, John was given an audition at La Scala, but nothing came of it except a few encouraging words from a kindly, bearded gentleman. John did not know who he was at the time, but was later on to find him a good friend. His name was Giulio Gatti-Casazza, and he was to become famous as manager of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

Every day the singing lesson was held at precisely the same time in the afternoon. The first half-hour was given up to the exercises—John was now beginning to recognize the value of those wonderful scales and phrases: the second half-hour was given to the study of some opera. In March it was *Faust*, and by the end of the month John had been engaged to sing Faust at a little village near Florence called Santa Croce sul Arno. This time he was actually offered a fee—his contract called for ten performances of *Faust* at twenty-lire per performance, i.e. about sixteen shillings. He was to pay his own way to Santa Croce and back, and to live there for six weeks, on a grand total of two hundred lire, or round about eight pounds.

'Wonderful to relate,' he says, 'I lived through it. It recalls to my mind a story of two drunk men discussing their infancy and their respective weights at birth.'

'Do you know what?' said one to the other. 'I only weighed four pounds when I was born!'

'Lord,' said his friend. 'Did you live?'

'Oh! indeed I did—and you should see me now!'

Faust at Santa Croce was performed by a highly cosmopolitan cast. The Margherita was a Brazilian, the Siebel and the Valentine were Russian, the Faust was an Irishman,

the Mephistopheles was a Greek, and they all sang the French opera in Italian. The chorus and most of the little orchestra came from the village. All in all, it was the most pleasantly informal engagement of a long career.

John got on well, except for one slight contretemps. In Italy the mortal sin for a singer is to break on a top note. John had seen and heard an Italian audience react to a broken top note, and himself lived in constant dread of cracking. This night the thing happened. He was singing the phrase after Margherita's exit in the second act, and came to the high B natural, when, lo and behold, it just happened.

John did not wait for the chorus of whistles which he felt sure was coming, but in his own words, 'just eased himself off the stage.' Unfortunately, the chorus, mistaking their cue, traipsed off after him—and the stage was left entirely empty during the playing of the waltz which finishes the act.

Immediately the curtain came down, the conductor, a fiery Neapolitan, rushed round to the back. John hastened to explain. The little man was most sympathetic, but someone had to be cursed, so he turned on the chorus, and in a short time John learned every swear-word in the Italian language and a good many in the Neapolitan dialect.

John was still scared, but word went round to the audience, and from the beginning of the third act he was applauded after every phrase. The opera finished late that night, leaving John with a deep gratitude to his kindly Santa Croce friends.

IV

p

The season finished in the middle of May, and John came home for his summer holiday. He gave a few concerts in



JOHN MC CORMACK IN 1903
LILY MC CORMACK WITH
CYRIL IN 1907

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Ireland, and after one of them received a criticism so telling and so prophetic that it must be set down in full. It appeared in the *Irish Society and Social Review* for July the 7th, and was written by Mrs. Power O'Donoghue:

'The great attraction of the concert, and the most advertised, was the appearance of Mr. J. F. McCormack, the young Athlone tenor, whose beautiful voice set all Dublin talking and speculating, something over a year ago. He was then very immature, but twelve months in Italy under a prime instructor has done much for him, and he is now on the high road to a great future. I believe that he will yet dominate the restricted little world of tenors—not in Ireland only, but across the water, in short, wherever he sings. He has a marvellous voice, as was evidenced by his beautifully tender rendering of "Ah! Moon of my delight," and "In her simplicity," while the power which he subsequently threw into that bunch of keys "*Salve dimora*" was most commendable. In the latter item he rang out the top C from the full chest, in absolutely thrilling fashion, and his entire reading of the song displayed a rare intelligence, united with great beauty of voice.

'I am not going to join the great bulk of his critics, who, from the fulsome ness of their compliments, stultify the value of their own judgment. I am not going to say of him that his singing is absolutely faultless, because it is not. He still has such a lingering defect as pronouncing "endearing" as though it began with i, and of saying "t'me" instead of giving the proper value to the vowel in the first word quoted. These are just such defects as an Italian singing master allows to pass unnoticed, but educated critics are jarred by them, and neither man nor woman can take a high place on an English platform or stage until they can sing the language of their country without any faults of pronunciation.

'What I have written is perfectly fair criticism. The young singer under notice has one of the best tenor voices, I should say, in the world to-day, coupled with delightful sympathy and a quite splendid grip of what composers mean. Moreover, he sings good music, which is refreshing, and discards the fashionable vocal rot which consists for the most part of a pedantic instrumental composition, with a small accompani-

ment for the voice. While conceding all this, however, and very much more that I leave unsaid, I do not recede an inch from my opinion that to sing English well a student must study it with one who is himself a master of the language—not with a foreigner. . . .

'Young J. F. McCormack sings perfectly in time, and no doubt will continue to do so, because he is going in for opera, and studying a repertoire, and he knows quite well that to make hemi-demi-semiquavers of written crotchets, and semi-breves of minims, will never do with orchestra. I may say for him that he is faultlessly in tune also, and although I give him my compliments—but no flattery—and I kiss my hand to him across the water, to fair Italy, whither he has gone with the youthful bride whom he married on Monday this week,—and, in my heart of hearts, I give him the homage that is due—not as to one who has already attained the standard of his own ideals, but to one who most surely will.'

v

The great joy of coming home was, of course, to be once more with Lily. As was only natural, the two decided that they could not bear to be separated again. Mrs. Foley raised objections, saying that they were still too young, and John's future too uncertain. But travel and experience had made a man of John. He said flatly that, if he was not allowed to marry Lily, he would refuse to go back to Milan and continue his studies.

Appalled at such determination, Mrs. Foley gave in. The two were married in the Pro-Cathedral at Dublin on July the 2nd, and went to London for their honeymoon.

They had very little money, but their hopes were unbounded. They lived simply—they had to—for the one indulgence they allowed themselves was costly. They went

to the opera at Covent Garden every night, and heard many of the greatest artists of the time.

One evening was memorable, not only for the singing, but for a prophecy. The two McCormacks, sitting in the amphitheatre—the best place in the house for listening—heard and saw *La Traviata* with Melba as Violetta, Caruso as Alfredo, and Battistini as the father. The singing was, of course, magnificent, but the eye did not come off as well as the ear, for the costumes were all anyhow. Melba was in modern dress, Caruso and Battistini in plumed hats and velvet costumes, silken hose, and buckled slippers.

During an interval, John turned to Lily.

'That is where I'm going to be one day,' he said, jerking his head towards the stage. 'And let me tell you this, me girl. If ever I get my foot in there, they'll have a devil of a job to get me out.'

The very next morning, Lily had a letter from her mother, anxiously suggesting that the honeymoon had gone on long enough, and that the couple should make straight for Milan. John agreed, and they began to pack up. Then suddenly he came in, the newspaper in his hand.

'Look at this, Lily. Battistini in Tschaikowsky's *Eugen Onegin!* We simply must hear that. It's one of the great performances.'

Lily looked doubtful. 'When is it?' she asked.

'Next Tuesday.'

Lily shook her head. 'No, John. That's five whole days away. We can't possibly wait that long. We can't afford it.'

'Ah, sure, Lily—'

John pleaded for all he was fit, saying what a wonderful lesson in singing it would be for him to hear the opera with this matchless baritone; but Lily was adamant.

'She put her foot down,' he says regretfully, 'and although she has a very small foot, when she puts it down, it stays down. So I never heard Battistini in *Eugen Onegin*.

Oh! I admit I tease her about it even to this day. So now, young brides of singers: never let financial reasons stand in the way of your husband if he wants to hear a great singer in a grand opera, because you will never hear the end of it.'

Lily bears him out—though she puts it somewhat differently.

'Well,' she says, 'as you can imagine, I never heard the end of that. If anyone mentions that opera, even to this day, I get a very black look from John.'

VI

So the two set sail on the day arranged, and came to Milan with their heads in the clouds. They were to need all their optimism. Luckily both had plenty. Things looked forbidding and dismal enough, yet the idea of defeat or failure never entered their minds. Engagements, in John's own phrase, were scarce as hens' teeth. Through July and the hottest August they ever experienced anywhere, they stayed on in Milan, John going for audition after audition that got him nowhere.

One could live cheaply in Italy in those days, but, even so, it became evident that there was no point in staying. After long consultations with the Sabatinis, the pair decided to go back and try their luck in London. The Maestro told John that he had been a good pupil, and that, if he remembered all he had been told and kept faithfully to his exercises, his voice would grow in strength and quality, and he might face the future confidently.

'You are still very young, Giovanni,' he said. 'Your voice is not yet mature. But you are on the right lines now,

doing nothing wrong, and as you grow older the voice will grow with you, and improve each year.'

So, late in September, John and Lily returned to London to chance their arm. They had nothing but their hopes, John's voice, and a few letters of introduction. The most prized of these was from Bishop Clancy, written from Sligo, to the Archbishop of Westminster, Dr. Bourne—later Cardinal Bourne. The Bishop had been one of John's helpers when he was trying to get to Milan. His letter was on a par with his earlier generosity.

But letters of introduction, however laudatory, do not make a living. John and Lily were in a strange city. There can be few things better for a young couple than to share their poverty and face their difficulties together. Parents, benevolent and anxious, are apt to insist that the young man obtain a settled position before he marry. They forget the tremendous stimulus and the sense of responsibility brought by a struggle which is shared; and, no matter how deep the understanding between the pair, the struggle cannot be fully shared until they are married.

How sharp and discouraging the struggle can be John now knew. Auditions had to be fought for, and, when they were won, they brought nothing. The Gramophone Company would have nothing to do with him, in spite of the records he had made before—or perhaps because of them. An audition at Daly's Theatre brought the offer of a job in the chorus of a musical comedy at three pounds a week. It was not accepted. The one good thing that audition did was to begin a friendship with the man who was sitting at the piano—the baritone Gordon Cleather, a fine artist and a good friend.

Still, there were a few engagements. For a fee of two guineas John sang as 'assisting artist' at the Palace Pier, Brighton. He sang in a 'flying matinée' at Portsmouth in support of Camille Clifford, the statuesque Gibson girl,

with Margaret Cooper. At another concert he supported George Grossmith, and at yet another assisted Edna May, who was captivated by the young tenor's voice, and showed him a kindness and encouragement which he has never forgotten. An introduction to Henry Mills, who ran the National Sunday League Concerts, brought an engagement to appear the very next day.

Another practical benefactor was Teddy Bailey, who owned the old Queen's Hotel in Leicester Square. Bailey, brother-in-law of Sir Harry Preston, that patron saint of sport, used to give after-dinner concerts in the hotel dining-room on Sunday nights. The fee was one guinea, with an excellent supper thrown in—a highly acceptable contribution to the McCormacks' finances.

But these concerts had for John an even greater importance. They illustrated a fact so valuable to beginning artists of every kind as to justify a digression.

A celebrated teacher of singing in London used to impress upon his pupils that they should never sing for less than five guineas. One of these pupils, at the start of his career, met another who had made a considerable reputation.

'Tell me,' said this singer to the novice, 'did old So-and-So fill you up with that stuff about never taking less than five guineas?'

'Yes,' replied the novice.

'Well,' said the singer, 'I hope to God you're not doing it.'

And he went on to impress upon his listener the importance of appearing anywhere and everywhere.

'Sing for a guinea, sing for half a crown,' he urged, 'because you never know who may hear you, and what an engagement may lead to.'

The novice followed the advice, accepted a two guinea fee the next day, and booked two engagements, one at

seven guineas, one at twenty, with people who heard him at the two guinea concert.

It is true that John was not in a position to turn down engagements, except such things as the offer from Daly's, which would have tied him up and done his voice no good. But these after-dinner sing-songs showed him once and for all the way things worked together to make the career of an artist who does not put on airs, who works hard, and does his best to give good value for money.

The accompanist at these concerts in the Queen's Hotel was one Charles Marshall, whose fate was to be bound up with John's in a manner that did great good to them both.

VII

Then, just before the end of 1906, came what looked like a real chance. John's rendering of Liza Lehmann's 'Ah! Moon of My Delight' had already won him praise, and the chance came to sing it in front of the composer. An operetta of hers, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, was shortly to be produced, and she engaged John to sing the part of Squire Thornhill. The operetta had been written for the famous American baritone, David Bispham, who was to sing the title part. Bispham was a fine artist and a splendid actor, but John found him intolerably pompous, and the two did not get on well together from the start. John was independent, and apt to blurt out damaging remarks; Bispham, a man who exacted absolute obedience and subservience to the star. Friction grew, and presently Bispham dismissed John from the cast, not because he sang badly, but because he spoke with an Irish accent. The part of Squire Thornhill, Bispham insisted, was essentially English, and John's brogue was fatal to it. This came oddly from Bispham, who had an American accent fit to strop a knife.

Despite his chagrin, when Bispham explained to him the reason for his dismissal John burst out laughing.

VIII

To offset this rebuff came a solid success. Although His Master's Voice were the leading gramophone company, there were others, and one of the best known, the Odeon Company, gave John his first regular recording contract.

The contract was for six years, the fee £150 a year, for which sum John was to make not more than twelve double-sided records a year. These terms seemed generous to the young singer, but the company had backed a winner, and as early as the summer of the next year they were doing well out of their new artist.

The first records were drawing-room ballads and Irish folk-songs. A few of them are still to be had, in special pressings made by the Regal-Zonophone Company. They are interesting curiosities. The voice is light, and often muffled by bad recording, and the accompaniments are terrific. In some of the quieter songs, a Moore's melody or two, the accompaniments, although grotesque, do not seriously interfere with the singer. In others, notably 'God Save Ireland' and 'A Nation Once Again,' an extraordinary agglomeration of instrumentalists, in spirit and execution resembling the band that sits in a wagonette at a travelling circus, kick up such a din that the singer can only be heard at intervals, warbling desperately like a blackbird in a thunderstorm. For the final stanza of 'A Nation Once Again,' one deep bass trombone, the player of which has obviously been holding himself in with difficulty, bursts into a pæan of such virtuosity and power that poor John is all but obliterated.

In those records where the voice can be heard reason-

ably well—the early records can be distinguished from the others by the label ‘J. F. McCormack, tenor, Dublin,’ and a very low rate of revolution, seventy-five or seventy-four to the minute—there is still not a great deal to mark the singer out from other good tenors making records at the same time. The recording mechanism of those early days did not succeed in catching the light and shade of John’s voice. It has a plummy quality, particularly on the lower notes, and the diction is not clear. The high notes ring, but as if they were emerging at great pressure from a very small orifice. As anyone knows who has seen John sing, this is far from being the case. Mercifully, the twelve months that followed saw a great improvement in the standard of recording.

The Odeon contract ran for four of its six years, after which another company bought the singer out. The later Odeon records were of far better quality, and we shall return to them presently.

IX

The end of the year found John and Lily back in Dublin. John had a few engagements, on concert platforms and at private houses. He sang for Vincent O’Brien, who was delighted by the progress he had made and by the increased power and range of his voice.

Early in the New Year John came back to London alone, leaving Lily in Ireland with her mother. She was expecting a child about the end of March. John’s heart was low, but the sheer necessity of getting started was a stimulus, and he attacked London with a determination harder than anything he had yet felt.

A couple of concert engagements came his way, the

second of which was to support Mabel Green and the Cherniavsky brothers at Cambridge. The Cherniavskys at this time were appearing as a trio of child prodigies. John sang Franco Leoni's ballad 'In Sympathy,' and the more vigorous '*Mattinata*' of Leoncavallo.

He ran back to Dublin to see how Lily was getting on, the expenses of the trip being helped by an 'At Home' concert in the Pembroke Road. He could only afford to stay a day or two, then returned to London.

This time luck came his way, and he obtained an audition with Maestro Alberto Visetti, a celebrated teacher of singing. Visetti was a man of exquisite manners, who seemed to belong to another age. For many years he had accompanied Patti, and he had a fund of anecdotes about his diva, which he loved to tell.

Visetti was the soul of kindness, and would have encouraged any beginner, but he was genuinely impressed by John's voice. He gave him two letters of introduction, one to William Boosey of Chappells, the other to Arthur Boosey of Boosey & Co. The two were cousins, and strong trade rivals.

John presented his letter at Chappells, was kept waiting a long time, and then told that Mr. Willie Boosey was very busy, and he must come another day. The phrase had a familiar ring, and John left the Bond Street house with his Irish pride a little hurt.

'Well,' he thought to himself. 'I may as well get both letters off my chest on the same day.'

So he said a prayer, and, hoping for the best, walked up Bond Street, turned into Regent Street, and presently found himself at number two hundred and ninety-five. He hesitated, then walked into the shop.

A languid and well-dressed young man came up and asked his business. John handed over his letter—then, his courage failing, he hurried out into Regent Street again.

He could not bear to wait and get an answer like the one he had had in Bond Street.

A few days later came a letter from Maestro Visetti, enclosing one to him from Arthur Boosey.

'How can I get in touch,' it ran, 'with the crazy young Irishman who presented your letter of introduction? I sent down word that he was to be shown to my office, but he had vanished. He intrigues me. Will you tell him to come here at eleven o'clock on Friday morning, and bring some music?'

John could not go that Friday morning, but another appointment was made. The omens were good. At the piano sat Samuel Liddle, whom John recalls as one of the greatest accompanists he ever heard. John sang 'The Flower Song' from *Carmen*, then a ballad by Stephen Adams, very popular at the time, called 'Nirvana.'

When he had finished, Boosey looked at Liddle. 'Sammy, this boy could sing that new song you played for me this morning.'

Liddle turned his smiling bespectacled eyes on John.

'Can you read music?' he asked.

John grinned. 'I'll try.'

The song, which John read in manuscript, was a setting of Charles Kingsley's verses, 'A Farewell,' in which the poet assures some unspecified young lady that, by the exercise of unintelligent virtue, she may win 'a purer poet's laurel than Shakespeare's crown.' The poem consists of three stanzas, and ends with these inspiring words:

Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever.
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long;
And so make Life, Death, and that vast Forever
One grand, sweet song.

The setting is simple, and the song speedily became a great favourite with teachers of singing, since it calls for

legato, smooth tone, and a good wind. John seems to have fulfilled all its requirements, for Boosey engaged him then and there to sing it and 'The Flower Song' at the Ballad Concert at the Queen's Hall for March the 1st. His fee was to be three guineas.

Though from that date his real success began, this was not John's first appearance at the Queen's Hall. The excellent Henry Mills came forward with the offer of an engagement to sing in a Sunday League Concert as 'assisting artist' to the violinist Marie Hall. The concert took place on Sunday, February the 17th. Supporting artists were Caroline Hatchard, Mildred Jones, a boy soprano named Gordon Travis, and Harry Dearth, the genial bass. Marie Hall was accompanied by Hamilton Harty, and the solo pianist was Irene Scharrer.

After the concert, John fell into conversation with Harry Dearth, and presently confided to him his ambition to sing in opera.

'Why don't *you* try?' he blurted out. 'With that grand voice of yours, you'd be a cert.'

Harry Dearth, like John, had begun in a small way, and the money he was now making seemed great wealth. He smiled and shook his head.

'Why should I bother? I'm getting good money.'

'What are you getting?' John persisted.

'I make fifty to seventy-five a week,' Harry Dearth replied, 'and I'm satisfied. Wouldn't you be?'

John shook his head vigorously.

'Oh, God, no,' he replied.

x

The days of the Ballad Concerts at the Queen's Hall are over, and musically they are no loss. But they gave the

young singer the chance to show his talent, and one may doubt whether they were any worse than what has taken their place. Looked at squarely, the sentiment of the drawing-room ballad was no worse than the slush of the crooner—and it was a good deal better for the voice.

John's appearance on March the 1st was an immediate and resounding success. Everyone, critics and audience, realized at once that something exceptional had arrived. Arthur Boosey immediately engaged him for the remaining concerts of the season, and for the whole series of the season following.

John received much encouragement also from his colleagues. After the concert, he had a conversation with Plunket Greene, who was particularly concerned lest he should lend his voice to music that was unworthy of it. Plunket Greene spoke scathingly of some of the items performed at the concert, singling out for special attack one of the *Indian Love Lyrics*, which had been sung by Verena Fancourt.

John did not quite know what to make of all this.

'Ah! sure,' he protested. 'It's not a bad ditty.'

Plunket Greene snorted. 'It's a hermaphroditty,' he said sternly.

The two singers remained friends till Greene's death, and John, though he could not but be aware of the flaws in his equipment and technique, always admired his interpretative power and cherished him as a friend.

The second concert, exactly a fortnight later, brought a very large audience—though it must in fairness be guessed that most of them had come to hear Clara Butt, who was the chief singer. But, quite apart from that, the young tenor had become 'news,' and some of the best known critics turned out to appraise him.

John was at the top of his form, and his singing brought him a notice in the *Daily Telegraph* which did more than

any single thing to make his success in England. The notice was written by Robert Maguire. Though primarily a political writer, Maguire was very fond of music, and was quite a good singer himself. He and John afterwards became very good friends, and sang together in the little Catholic church at Streatham, where both of them lived.

'The idols of the occasion,' wrote Maguire, 'were Dame Clara Butt and the new Irish tenor John McCormack . . .

'Mr. McCormack made a great impression, as good new tenors seldom fail to do. It would, of course, be absurd to say that his voice has either the brilliance, power, or range of Caruso's, but, quite frankly, it has a great deal of the Caruso smooth, pure, and attractive quality.'

Caruso was then, as he remained till his death, the king of tenors. For a young singer to have his name mentioned in the same breath with Caruso meant success. Other papers followed suit, and John received the title of 'The Irish Caruso.' In musical circles, this might do him more harm than good: but it made the public eager to hear him, and laid the foundations for his success.

But the *Telegraph* was not the only paper to praise him spontaneously. In the *Musical Opinion and Musical Review*, a writer signing himself 'W. B.' devoted more than half his notice to John. W. B. admitted to being puzzled.

'No doubt the voice was excellent,' he wrote, 'yet the actual *effect* of his singing seemed to be in excess of the voice. . . . A more perfect and more beautiful display of vocal art I would not wish to hear. The chief and peculiar charm of Mr. McCormack's singing appears when using easily the middle notes from (say) D downwards: he has adequate power and the high notes produced with great ease are of a clear ringing quality. . . .

'Contrary to my own precept never to prophesy unless you know, I am about to be guilty of that rash proceeding. I believe that this unheralded young singer will—at any

rate on the concert platform—be one of the most popular and the most admired tenors of the day.'

The other papers all took the same line.

'Mr. McCormack possesses a singularly fine voice, and sang with great charm and expression.'

'Mr. McCormack has a genuine tenor voice of particularly agreeable quality, and adequate range and power. His method of production is sound, and he sings with notable fervour and feeling.'

'Mr. McCormack sang with wonderful smoothness and beauty of tone and with very finished phrasing.'

'I should think that a great future awaits the young Irish tenor, Mr. John McCormack, who made such a hit at the Ballad Concert at Queen's Hall on Friday last. It is many a long day since I have heard a tenor voice of such exquisite quality and purity; while his singing, if not yet absolutely finished, gave abundant proof of refined and artistic perception. Mr. McCormack is a mere boy in years, and has not yet overcome the delightful burr of the Irish brogue. Once he has done that what an acquisition he will prove in oratorio, and, perhaps, English opera.'

The last sentence was prophetic—though, if opera had had to wait for John to lose his brogue, it would be waiting still.

CHAPTER 4

THE BALLAD CONCERTS were useful to John in more ways than one. Quite apart from the steady work they gave him, work of the kind for which he was best fitted, they made him one of the best friends of his career. This was Arthur Boosey, a great gentleman, to whom John's debt of gratitude can never be repaid. Boosey not only looked after John from the musical point of view. He had perception enough to forgive the boy's occasional bluntness and gaucherie, and to give him advice with a frankness equal to his own.

The growing-pains of a young artist are extremely painful. He is born with a knowledge of certain things, and he clings to that knowledge desperately, as his one guide in a world of chaos. The knowledge may give him an inward confidence, an arrogance even, but at the same time he is raw and vulnerable, and terribly anxious to please. His elders intimidate him, he finds it hard to differ from their expressed opinions, and, as a result, he is driven either to keep silence, and afterwards feel bitterly ashamed, or to contradict them and assert his own feeling with disproportionate violence.

John's tendency was to this latter method. Boosey never resented his frankness, either to himself or to others, but strove gently to make him more moderate.

'Now, John,' he would say, 'curb your Irish enthusiasm.'

It was an odd expression for awkward candour, but most happily chosen, for it at once acquitted John of any

desire to wound, and suggested that what he felt was a mere natural excess of something he could not help.

II

The Irish enthusiasm certainly needed curbing. One day Boosey greeted John with the news that Stephen Adams had written a song specially for him, and was coming in person to show it. Stephen Adams had for years been king of the ballad world, and, although his throne was now beginning to wobble, he was still very much the great man. So John, suitably impressed, came to audience, and stood reverently while Samuel Liddle played the new song.

It was a waltz song called 'Brown Eyes,' and, as he listened, John's reverence swiftly sank to zero.

As soon as the song was finished, Stephen Adams turned to the young singer. He was an imposing figure, well over six feet in height, and he wore his reputation like a cloak.

'Well?' he said.

John gulped. 'I think it's awful.'

Stephen Adams's majestic brows rose high. Then they drew down.

'I think you are a very impertinent young man,' he boomed.

A very awkward moment followed. Liddle blinked behind his glasses and fidgeted with the music. Arthur Boosey assumed the expressionless look of a butler welcoming guests when the parlourmaid drops a tray. John cocked an eye at the ceiling and hummed to keep himself in countenance.

Adams stalked to the piano, picked up his song, and departed in all the wrath of outraged majesty.

Instead of abusing John, Boosey turned to him with a charming smile.

'Well,' he said, 'that's done it.'

John stood mulishly, like a cross child.

'Hang it all,' he said, 'it *was* awful.'

'I know it was,' said Boosey. 'You are perfectly right. But, John, you must be more tactful! You did not have to tell him your opinion quite so frankly. There are other ways.'

It was not the first time that Boosey had had to apply the brake, but he did it always with such kindness and understanding that he commanded John's full confidence. If John is not always a model of tact to-day, the 'Irish enthusiasm' is a good deal more under control than it would have been had there been no such man as Arthur Boosey.

III

On March the 27th Lily's baby, a boy, was born in Dublin. John rushed over post-haste to find the mother and son both doing splendidly.

'To this day,' he complains, 'she laughs as she recalls my look of utter foolish helplessness, when the nurse put Cyril into my arms. But sure, 'twas small blame to me. I had no experience of fatherhood.'

IV

But London was calling, and John could not stay any length of time in Dublin. Concert engagements were coming in well, and at the regular Queen's Hall concerts John was steadily increasing his reputation. That which took

AS JOHN WAS WHEN HE
FIRST MET LILY



AS HE APPEARED IN
'FAUST' IN DUBLIN, 1906

place on April the 21st brought him a letter which was the beginning of a long friendship.

'DEAR MR. McCORMACK,

'It was with the greatest pleasure that I heard you sing at the Queen's Hall last evening, and an additional joy to hear your beautiful rendering of "Like Stars Above."

'You have indeed a grand voice, and your phrasing is that which we should like to hear in all vocalists' efforts! I shall look forward to writing you a song for next season. Pray accept my heartiest congratulations on the success you have made already, and, with all best wishes for your future career.

Yours sincerely,

W. H. SQUIRE.'

No wonder John was pleased. The famous 'cellist was fast coming to the front as a composer of ballads; and, after all, the man who has written a song should know if one has sung it well.¹

In May came a visit to Dublin, during which John took the title part in *Faust* as guest artist of the Dublin Amateur Operatic Society. A few days later, he sang Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Both performances were under the experienced direction of Barton McGuckin. John made a great success, although several papers commented upon the fact that his acting did not reach the same standard as his singing. He admits readily that as an operatic actor he was no Chaliapin. This seems odd, seeing that he could obviously have been an excellent actor on the legitimate stage. It is plain that something constrained him to put the whole dramatic expression into his voice, and to be content with merely formal gestures. I remember reading in the *Irish Statesman* an account of Tom Burke's appearance

¹ I am deferring all question of musical values till Chapter 12.

in an opera, in which the writer—I have an idea that it was Walter Starkie—praised Burke for refusing to act in the traditional manner, and compared his ‘noble aloofness and austerity’ with that of McCormack.

Be that as it may, John, for whatever reason, confined himself in opera to singing his music with the maximum expression of which he was capable, and making such dramatic gestures as would harmonize with those made by his colleagues.

The performance of *Faust* in Dublin was a real feat, because the orchestra was tuned a semitone high—a strain on the tenor and soprano, and no joke for contralto, baritone, and bass.

v

Then came the second of John’s great strokes of luck. In the early summer of 1907 all the Colonial Premiers came to London for an Imperial Conference. Of these Premiers, two men stood out: Canada’s Sir Wilfred Laurier, and General Louis Botha, the statesman-warrior from South Africa.

The Irish Nationalist Party gave a banquet for Botha and the others at the House of Commons, and brought along two singers to entertain them, Denis O’Sullivan and John.

General Botha enjoyed himself mightily. He had always loved Ireland and everything Irish, as his wife was a descendant of Robert Emmett. He was delighted with both singers.

‘I never heard music so beautiful,’ he said. ‘But of all the songs, I like best “The Wearing of the Green.” It has such a grip in it.’

‘The Wearing of the Green’ was sung, not by John, but by O’Sullivan. On the other hand, Botha and Mr. Morley

—later Lord Morley—confessed that ‘“The Irish Emigrant” as rendered by Mr. McCormack, was enough to bring tears from a stone.’

Among those who also admitted being moved was Mr. Winston Churchill. He said that the occasion was more than great, it was historic.

‘It is the first time,’ Mr. Churchill said, ‘since the Act of Union, that Irish Nationalist members have entertained a Minister of the Crown.’

VI

There was at that time in London a young Canadian singer, a protégée of Sir Wilfred and Lady Laurier. She had been studying in Europe, and, having heard John sing at the Ballad Concerts, wrote to ask him who his teacher was.

John replied, and a friendship was formed which has lasted till the present day. The lady’s name was Eva Gauthier, and she soon became, in John’s words, ‘one of the finest exponents of modern songs I ever heard, a splendid musician and an expert stylist. She should have come to England to teach. She would have been a great success.’

All the hostesses in London vied with one another to entertain the statesmen from the colonies, and a reception was given for the Lauriers by Sir John Murray Scott, the man who was responsible for giving the Wallace Collection to the nation. To this Eva Gauthier was naturally invited, and she asked her host if she might bring John with her. Sir John and his sisters assented gladly. They would have done so in any case, but they were already interested.

On the day when John made his début at the Queen’s Hall, Sir John had been asked to go to hear another singer. ‘Oh, I can’t,’ he said. ‘I’ve heard him once already.’

But the singer's friends protested that he had made great progress in the interval, and at last Sir John went. After the concert, he picked up the programme.

'Well,' he said. 'I don't know about So-and-So. But that other young fellow, who sang "The Flower Song"—what's his name—McCormack—he'll go far.'

Sir John Murray Scott was a man of outstanding personality. Huge, tall, and heavy, weighing over twenty stone, he was an excellent musician, and played the piano with the lightest touch possible. An expert on pictures, on sculpture, on furniture, he loved music best. He had heard every great singer, violinist, and pianist of his time.

So it was into an atmosphere both friendly and expectant that John came when he paid his first call. He was received by Miss Mary Scott, Sir John's sister. Her heart went out in sympathy to the boy. Obviously, he had no money. He did not look as if he even had enough to eat. His face was thin and drawn, his manner alternately shy and friendly. She could feel his desperate eagerness to get on, and, with it, a sort of authority, a knowledge of his own powers.

'If only I could be heard,' he kept repeating. 'If only they would hear me.'

She complimented him on his success at the Queen's Hall. He shook his head impatiently.

'It's not enough. I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful. I was lucky to get it—very lucky. But I've more in me than that. At least, I hope so.'

He looked at her, serious, anxious. Then he smiled. They talked of other things for a while, till John rose to go. A piece of music was lying open on the piano. It was a duet—Goring-Thomas's 'Dear Love of Mine.' John looked up.

'Do you sing?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Do you know this?'

'Yes.'

'Let's sing it.'

They sang it together. In the room, the beauty of John's voice was overwhelming. Its soft fullness, its extraordinary light and shade were far more apparent than in the large space of the Queen's Hall. Miss Scott was enchanted. By the time John left, he had made a friend for life.

More visits followed. Sir John heard him sing, and all his faith in John's future was confirmed. Better, he liked the boy. For hours John sat at his feet, listening to his tales of the transcendental piano playing of Liszt, of Wieniawski's gorgeous tone, and of Mario and Patti singing together in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

John pressed him eagerly with questions about the technique of these great singers.

'Tell me about Mario, Sir John. Is it true, as Sabatini says, that he was as flexible as the best sopranos?'

'Mac,' said the big man impressively, 'there never was a time when his runs and scales were less clear than Patti's, and there were many times when I thought they were clearer.'

John would have liked to believe it, but he remained sceptical until a couple of years later, when he heard Sir Charles Santley. The great Victorian baritone was then over seventy, but he sang runs as John never heard man sing them before or since. His performance of '*Del Minacciar del Vento*' from Handel's *Ottone* still remains to John a model of Handelian singing.

John was greatly flattered by the fatherly interest of Sir John Murray Scott, as well he might be. The interest took a very practical turn. One day, when John had been talking, Sir John planted a hand on each of his enormous knees.

'What do you want?' he asked him bluntly.

John looked him in the eyes. 'I want to get to Covent Garden.'

Sir John said nothing, but next day he went round to see Harry Higgins, the manager. Higgins was impatient.

'I can't be bothered,' he said. 'I've a list as long as your arm, all wanting me to hear them.'

Sir John looked at him fixedly.

'I know something about music,' he said, 'and I tell you that I never heard a voice like this since Mario.'

Despite himself, Higgins was impressed.

'All right, blast you,' he said. 'Bring him along.'

Sir John brought him along, and John sang.

'Yes, yes,' said Higgins. 'It's a lovely voice, I grant you. But it's too small. He'll never be heard over an orchestra.'

Sir John laughed.

'Make your damned orchestra play softer,' he replied.

If he had never said another word, the hearts of singers all the world over would go out to him. How often, when an enthusiastic conductor is making the strings saw their instruments in half and the brass choir blow their heads off, while on the stage a poor inoffensive tenor is trying to pour forth his love and make himself heard even by the lady he is addressing, could one wish for a Sir John Murray Scott, to bellow in the conductor's ear, 'Make your damned orchestra play softer.'

John's audition was made in September, in the presence of Percy Pitt, the English conductor, and Maestro Mugnone, the famous conductor from Naples. Pitt was, as usual, non-committal. Mugnone, after praising John's Italian pronunciation, asked him to wait.

John waited what seemed hours, and had sunk deep in a dream of depression when he heard Pitt say, 'The management are pleased, and will be glad to engage you for the autumn season, if you will accept fifteen pounds a week.'

John jumped to his feet.

'I would accept anything to get into Covent Garden,'

he exclaimed; and then, remembering what he had said to Lily, 'Once I get in, you will never get me out.'

The management made no attempt to get him out. Nothing less than a European war was able to do that.

VII

John's début was put down for October the 15th. The part he was to sing was Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

At the first rehearsal, when he was presented to his colleagues, John got on the wrong side of the conductor, Panizza. He had turned up in a silk hat and morning coat, a custom which he thought was *de rigueur*. The conductor thereupon reported him to the management as no serious artist.

Once they got to know each other, however, the two got on quite well. The Maestro was a good routine conductor, and not hard to follow.

John's colleagues were charming. The Santuzza was Borghild Bryhn, a statuesque young Scandinavian with a gorgeous voice. The operatic stage suffered a severe loss when she married young and retired. Her voice and style resembled those of Flagstad, and she was a fine actress.

The Alfio was Angelo Scandiani, with whom John was to sing many operas both in London and in Australia, and who was to become one of his dearest friends and colleagues. After he retired from the operatic stage, Scandiani became general manager of the Scala in Milan.

When the great night came, John was desperately nervous. Sir John Murray Scott had been the soul of kindness to him. He had insisted on his coming to the house, and had given him and Lily a good lunch. Then John had been sent to lie down and rest.

In good time, he had been wakened with a bottle of white wine and a dozen oysters, and sent down finally to the theatre in Sir John's own brougham.

But all the kind attentions in the world could not make him any less nervous. Nervousness is an affliction he has never got over, and what he says on the subject may be of comfort to many young singers and actors.

He was speaking only a short while ago to me and to Walter Legge, the manager of Covent Garden and the recording manager of His Master's Voice.

'I have known,' said John, 'every great singer for the past thirty years, and there was not one—not one—who was not nervous before singing. Once, when I was in New York, I saw a newspaper interview with Flagstad, in which she said she was never nervous. I had met her after a superb performance as Isolde. She did not speak English very well then, and, of course, my knowledge of her language was nil, but in a mixture of English and German she told me she was always nervous.'

'I looked at the article again, and then saw what had happened. The interviewer had let himself go in his final paragraph. "The amateur going in front of his public"—I like that personal pronoun!—"is nervous always. The true professional"—and what in art's name is a true professional?—"sure of his effects and treating his art as a science is nervous NEVER." How one is to treat an art as a science, I'm afraid I can't explain. That young interviewer was mixing up nervousness with fear—a very different thing.'

Nervousness, as distinct from fear, every sensitive artist has to contend with always. However, as a singer's experience increases, he learns to minimise or to abolish altogether the effect which nervousness has upon him. He learns not to let it hamper his performance. He learns to regard it as something unpleasant, like a toothache, which is always there, but must be disregarded, and which at all

costs must not be allowed to interfere with his breathing or to constrict his throat.

John, on his first night at Covent Garden, had not yet acquired this freedom. *Cavalleria* is not kind to a nervous beginner, for Turiddu has to open with the 'Siciliana,' sung off-stage before the curtain rises, as a part of the overture. Indeed, there was every excuse for fright. He was in the presence of the most critical audience in the world, and he found the vast space of the Covent Garden stage most bewildering. He got through the performance in a dream, numb, hardly knowing what he was doing. If he was nervous before the curtain went up, he was doubly nervous by the time it went down, for fear that he had disgraced himself. Little as he could remember, he knew that he had not sung his best. He expected disaster.

To his amazement, he received a tremendous welcome. Six times he was called before the curtain. Shouts of 'McCormack, McCormack,' rang through the house, and, though he was too shy to take a call alone, it was clear to all that the ovation was for him.

'If I had known,' he said to the reporters afterwards, 'that the audience would have been so generous to a beginner, I should have been able to do so much better. The size of it all confused me—but I hope I got my voice into the space.'

The hope was justified. Seldom can a young singer have had such a reception from press and public—and John, at twenty-three, was the youngest principal ever to have been engaged at Covent Garden. The press next day was uniformly sympathetic. The report in the *Westminster Gazette* is typical, and summed up what was said by all the others:

'If Mr. John McCormack, the young Irish tenor recently discovered, who made his London operatic début last night in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, had been an Italian he would perhaps

hardly have attracted very much attention. It would have been said that he had a small voice of pleasing quality, which would doubtless be heard to better advantage in a smaller building, and that is about all. We have not got so many native operatic tenors, however, that we can afford to deal with them so lightly, and therefore Mr. McCormack may be considered a little more closely. On the whole his *début* was certainly successful. His voice is not, indeed, quite large enough for the vast spaces of Covent Garden, but it is certainly one of a very pure and agreeable quality, and he employs it with excellent judgment and taste. He has other qualifications for the operatic stage, too—for one thing, a slim and graceful figure, which attribute alone serves almost to place him in a class by himself among operatic tenors, while his acting, if more or less conventional at present, is easy and natural. No doubt in time, too, his voice will gain in power without, it may be hoped, losing any of its sweetness. At present it is not very big, and when he was heard side by side with Scandiani, say, it was impossible not to be struck by the contrast in the matter of volume and resonance, and Scandiani himself is hardly reckoned a giant. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that Mr. McCormack is not a baritone, but a tenor, and tenors, as we know, are judged by a standard of their own, and must not expect everyone to prove a second Tamagno or Caruso. Mr. McCormack is certainly neither the one nor the other, but it would be very pleasant none the less to hear him at Covent Garden in place of some of those who come to us with bigger reputations and perhaps more powerful voices from beyond the Channel.'

The Times, commenting soberly according to its wont, admitted that the 'assembled multitude was greater than usual,' and that the scene at the end of *Cavalleria* was 'one not often witnessed in our chief opera house.' It went on to say that John had for obvious reasons a great deal to learn:

'But he certainly created a favourable impression, and there is no denying the beauty of the tenor voice which frequently has been heard in the concert room. . . . The quality of his voice, joined to his apparent possession of

temperament should one day stand him in excellent stead and lead him high up the operatic ladder.'

Other accounts praised his dramatic singing in the Farewell scene, and commented that his voice increased remarkably in power during the evening. 'Enthusiastic reception of British tenor'; 'Young tenor's remarkable success'; 'Mr. John McCormack's first appearance'; 'New British tenor'; 'An Irish Caruso': there were headlines in plenty, and they all told the same story. The boy from Athlone had arrived, and the ball was at his feet.

VIII

John's next opera was *Don Giovanni*, in which he was to sing Don Ottavio. Covent Garden in those days was blessed by the possession of a master répétiteur at the piano, by the name of Waddington. 'Waddy' was revered and loved by a whole generation of singers. He had taught more operas to more singers than any man in any opera house in the world. He sang everybody's part in every opera that he taught, in Italian, French, or German, pronouncing them in the same imperturbable Cockney.

'He was Patience on a monument, smiling at singers.' John says of him. 'In ten days he made me letter perfect in the part of Don Ottavio. I was so well schooled by this genius that I could go on the stage to-day after more than thirty years and sing that part without a rehearsal. Bless you, Waddy.'

The Donna Anna was a well-known Russian soprano by the name of Felia Litvinne. She was a fine singer, but she was rather large. John at twenty-three looked distinctly young and immature to be assuring this matronly bereaved

Donna Anna that he would be father as well as lover to her. The Italian chorus at rehearsal noted the fact, and laughed audibly. John laughed too, but dare not be audible.

The Don Giovanni was Mario Sammarco, who had sung Tonio in *Pagliacci* on the night of John's début. Sammarco was something of a freak. He was a beautiful singer and an excellent actor, the best Rigoletto within memory, but nature never meant him for a Don Giovanni. He was short, and his figure was not at all heroic, yet so fine an actor was he, so magnificently could he hold himself, that an audience was hypnotized into forgetting his lack of inches.

There was something hypnotic about his singing too. His voice was one of the shortest on record, its compass barely stretching over the single octave. Within this narrow range it was mellow, powerful, and of beautiful quality, though occasionally disfigured by a strong *vibrato*. Listening to Sammarco, a brother artist might first of all think 'This is a strange voice'; then, 'I don't like it'; then 'But there's something in it after all'; and finally 'This is magnificent.'

Sammarco had no *agilita*, but in parts like Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, he managed once again to hypnotize the audience, by the sheer vigour and élan of his attack, into believing that he was singing the runs.

How on earth he managed some of the great baritone rôles, with their wide compass, remains a mystery. I asked John, who sang with him so often, how he did it. He scratched his head. 'I don't know,' he confessed.

The conductor was Percy Pitt, a man with very many friends in the musical profession, but, to John, the most uninspiring conductor under whom he ever sang. Another singer who shared this opinion was the great baritone Antonio Scotti. One evening Scotti was listening to a colleague, John Rorsell of the Stockholm Opera House, sing-



AS 'DON OTTAVIO' IN MOZART'S 'DON GIOVANNI'
(JOHN MC CORMACK'S FAVOURITE RÔLE)

ing the title part in *Don Giovanni*. In the famous aria '*Fin ch'han dal vino*,' Forsell and the orchestra were by no means together. Nothing that Pitt could do joined the gap between them. Scotti's comment was: '*Era un corso di cavalli ed ha vinto Forsell.*' (It was a horse race, and Forsell won.)

Of all the many operas in which John sang during his career, his favourite was and is *Don Giovanni*.

'I loved to sing the part of Don Ottavio,' he says, 'and I think I sang it well.'¹

'I loved everyone else's part as well. I used to stand all the time in the wings, so that I should not miss a note of that heaven-inspired music. Mozart was well named Wolfgang Amadeus, the loved of God.'

John's reception in this part was even more cordial than the first.

'The Don Ottavio of Mr. John McCormack,' said *The Times*, 'was a great success; the songs—both of them were given—were sung with fine taste and vocal finish, while the timbre of the voice is exactly what is wanted in the part.'

The *Daily News* said that he sang 'with much beauty of voice and instinctive feeling for phrasing.' The *Outlook* commended his avoidance of exaggeration and sentimentality. The *Tribune*, while praising the beauty of his voice, remarked that the disproportion between its volume and that of Madame Litvinne's was not to the benefit of Mozart's music. The *Standard*, the *Referee*, the *Telegraph*, all the papers agreed that the newcomer had greatly strengthened the good impressions made at his début, and had shown himself a worthy member of the company.

After this success, the question arose as to what opera John should sing next. Tetrazzini was soon to appear, and

¹ It was of one of Don Ottavio's arias, '*Il mio tesoro andate a consolar,*' that he made, in 1910, the record generally considered his best, and the classic interpretation of the aria.

the management decided that the young Irish tenor should sing with her. Great though her reputation was abroad, the authorities were sceptical of her success; but John, not knowing this, was wildly excited.

Tetrazzini had been engaged for *Rigoletto*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *La Traviata*. Should John sing the Duke in the first, or Alfredo in the last? This point the management decided in a way that has puzzled John ever since. The order went forth that John should sing the Duke, because it was 'so much easier than Alfredo.'

John has since discussed this decision with many great tenors, including Caruso, and many great directors, including Campanini, without ever finding anyone to agree with the Covent Garden authorities of that day. Caruso, when the question was put to him, could not believe that John was serious.

'But it is absurd!' he exclaimed, throwing out his hands. 'The Duca is one of the mos' really difficult parts in Italian opera of that kind. But Alfredo—Alfredo can be played by a *comprimario*.'

John himself always felt that the tenor part in *Traviata*—and he sang it many times—was the stupidest, least effective part in all opera. He maintains that it must have been after hearing a performance of *Traviata* that von Bülow uttered his famous *bon mot*—'The tenor voice is a disease.'

So it came about that John sang in *Rigoletto* instead of *La Traviata*, and made a success he might otherwise have missed.

The part was taken by an Italian tenor from Trieste, Giuseppe Krismer, who also sang with Tetrazzini in *Lucia*.

CHAPTER 5

WHILE HE WAS studying his part in the new opera, John spent many happy hours in Sir John Murray Scott's house. Sir John was more than delighted with his success, and John was overjoyed to be able to show that his patron's interest had been worth while.

An added pleasure at this time was that Mrs. Godfrey Pierce, daughter of the great Mario, was staying in the house. Always anxious to hear details about celebrated singers, John drew her out, and listened raptly to many stories of her father and Madame Grisi, her mother.

One of these stories greatly took his fancy. It is not new, but it is worth repeating. Mario and Grisi had been engaged to sing at an 'At Home.' The guest of the occasion was a very distinguished noble lord. After congratulating the two artists on their beautiful singing, he turned to Madame Grisi and asked, 'How are the little Grisettes?'

'My lord,' replied Madame Grisi, 'they are quite well. But you are mistaken. You must surely mean Marionettes.'

Mario never shaved, and had a beautiful silken beard, of which he was tremendously proud. A bearded tenor looked a little odd in certain rôles, and Mario was told as much, but would not listen. One day the Czarina of Russia told him he should shave off his beard to play a certain part.

The Italian bowed.

'*Majesté*,' he said, '*je vous donnerai ma vie si vous la voulez. Mais ma barbe! Oh, jamais!*'

Another fact, particularly interesting to John, was that Mario and Grisi together for an 'At Home' received a

hundred guineas. The cost of singing had gone up since those days. Caruso's fee for such an appearance was £500, and John was often to get 'as near as made no matter.'

II

The morning of the first rehearsal with Tetrazzini John never forgot.

The artists had gathered in the foyer of Covent Garden. Panizza, the conductor, was sitting, softly playing arpeggios at the piano in the corner. Sammarco had an arm about John's shoulders, and was trying out on him, with many a burst of laughter, his newly learned English. The other singers, who were playing the smaller parts, were sitting round on sofas. All were in a state of tension waiting for the diva.

At last there was a hum of excitement on the stair outside, and a sound of many voices approaching. The singers all got to their feet, and in flounced Tetrazzini.

The Florentine nightingale was nothing to look at. She was short, plump, and vivacious, with quick, excited movements, and brilliant black eyes. But there was something about her, a simplicity, a warmth, a directness, which at once attracted her colleagues. After introductions and greetings, in which she professed herself delighted to meet the rest of the cast, and indeed seemed delighted, the rehearsal began. John, who had liked her on sight, was immediately captivated by her work.

'She had a superb vocal technique.' The middle of her voice was white and breathy, probably from overwork as a young singer. But above E flat she was superb. Her chromatic scales upward and downward were marvels of clearness, and her trill was a trill indeed. She could get an

amazing amount of *larmes dans la voix*, far more than I ever heard from any other coloratura soprano.'

But what finally endeared Tetrazzini to those with whom she worked was that she was a marvellous colleague. She rejoiced in the success of her fellow artists, because she had no inferiority complex. She rejoiced in it, just as she rejoiced in her own triumph. Her tremendous success intoxicated her, but she was never spoiled. She never tried to succeed at another's expense, and she did everything to include her colleagues in her own success.

To John, as a young artist, she was kindness itself. He sang many operas with her: *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Il Barbiere*, *La Figlia del Reggimento*, *Lakmé*, *La Sonnambula*.

'She never looked the part in any of them,' he says, 'but she certainly sang it.'

Tetrazzini's appearance in *Traviata* was a dizzy success. London went wild. She was called twenty times before the curtain, and everyone was asking how it was that such a wonderful artist had not been heard in London before.

Tetrazzini followed up her first success with a performance in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, in which she had an even greater success.

Because of their doubts, the management of Covent Garden had not signed her contract on the night of her first appearance. She told John afterwards with a wink and a smile, that she was very glad they had not! Armed with her triumph, she demanded, and got, very different terms from those first offered her.

III

Tetrazzini was next announced to sing in *Rigoletto* with Sammarco as the jester and John as the Duke. Even greater

crowds assembled than had come to hear Melba and Caruso. The queues began early in the morning, and, when the hour drew near, extra police had to be fetched to control the traffic. This time Tetrazzini's success was greater than ever; but John stood up to her well.

After his solo and duet with Gilda, just before the Abduction scene, John was recalled enthusiastically several times. Tetrazzini, beaming with pleasure, congratulated him warmly then and there, to the obvious delight of the audience.

The Times said that John 'made quite a furore by his beautiful singing of "*La donna è mobile.*"' *The Morning Post*, after saying that John's voice was best suited to operatic music of that type, continued:

'He sang the aria at the opening of the opera with freedom and warmth, and gave "*La donna è mobile*" with good tone and delightful abandon as well as with a certain unconventionality in his turns which misled the conductor but won an enthusiastic encore.'

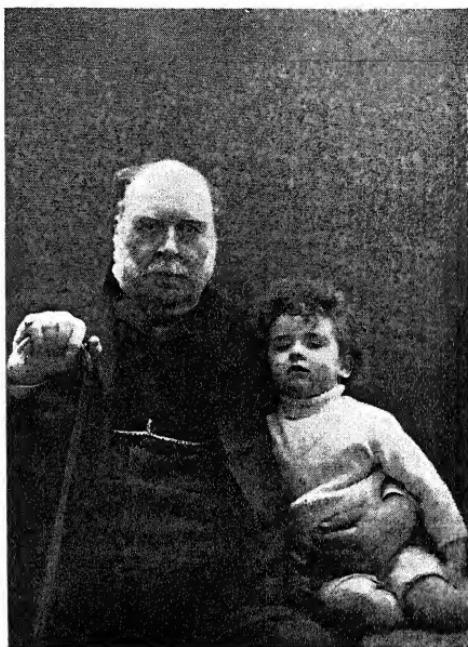
It went on to comment unfavourably upon his acting, and suggested that his bearing suggested only a temporary promotion to the position of Duke.

Mary Anderson (Madame de Navarro), whose friendship John had made at Sir John Murray Scott's, supported this criticism.

'Giovanni,' she scolded him, 'do learn to stand *still* on the stage. The art of listening on the stage is almost lost. The moment he comes on, everyone wants to act.'

She followed up this advice by speaking Hamlet's advice to the players to John alone. Her kindness, and the extreme beauty of her voice, touched deeply the always susceptible young singer.

A day or so later, in congratulation on his success, Mary Anderson sent him her photograph. The photograph and



SIR JOHN MURRAY SCOTT AND
MISS MARY SCOTT
WITH CYRIL

the letter she wrote with it were an inspiration to him, for she was as great an actress as she was a lady. On the photograph she wrote:

"He who hath the steerage of your course direct your sail."

To the devout young Irishman these words came with tremendous power. She had understood him, and spoke to him in the language he was best fitted to hear.

IV

Sir John Murray Scott had now worked out a routine for John. Every day he sang, Lily and he lunched at the beautiful house at Connaught Place, and then went for a drive in the park. After that John rested in D. room, with strict instructions from Sir John to the staff that he must on no account be disturbed. Then, at precisely half-past six, Sir John's private brougham came to the door to drive John down to Covent Garden. Soon everyone round the stage door recognized the brougham, and the porters would call out good-natured banter to its occupant.

'Gawd, Mac, you're a swanker, you are, and no mistake!'

If ever a young singer should have been spoiled, it was John: but not even his bitterest enemies—and he has a few—could accuse him of conceit. He has always had towards his singing the objective, impersonal view of a true artist.

I remember one evening playing him some of the records which he made for the Odeon Company during the year 1907 and the two years following. One or two of them had completely escaped his memory.

'Would you like to hear yourself sing "*Vesti la giubba*," John?'

'What's that? I never recorded that.'

'You did—and in English, too.'

'I don't believe ye.'

'Listen, then.'

I put the record on, and a lyrical, passionless voice began sweetly to inform us of Canio's unhappy plight. John put up with it till the phrase 'On with the motley.' Then he jumped up.

'Off with the motley, for God's sake,' he exclaimed, and charged over to the machine.

Next I played him his record of Tosti's '*Ideale*.' This is a very different pair of shoes. I have heard many singers in this song, and have five records of it, but John's, though made so long ago, will stand with the best. He listened critically, his large head on one side.

'Ah,' he exclaimed after one note, 'imitation Caruso'; in another place, 'Vulgar! imitation De Lucia!' Then, when the young tenor slurred from one note to another, 'Ah God, man—make up your mind!'

After the sustained *pianissimo* at the end, '*Torna! Torna!*' he nodded.

'Ah now, that's not bad. That's not bad. He had something in him, that young fella had.'

Another day he was playing some of his old records to us in the Kensington studio. Of one effect he cried, 'That's pure McCormack,' and then, aiming a kick at the machine, 'No one could do that but you, you b—!'

He knows exactly what he could do and could not do, and what he can still do. If you ask him, he will tell you. But of conceit, in the sense of rating his powers above their value, or of thinking himself entitled to special consideration outside his own world, he has none. A career which has enabled him to meet a large number of the world's outstanding men and women has given him a shrewd sense of human values. He is no respecter of per-

sons, except those who deserve respect for their worth as human beings, and he himself asks to be judged by no other standard.

v

So John, thanks to his own good sense and to the good offices of Sir John Murray Scott and, more than anything, to the care which Lily took of him, avoided all the snares that beset the young artist who has made a success. His head was not turned, either by the praise of critics or the adoration of that host of women with more money than sense, and more susceptibility than either, who besiege artists of every kind. A good-looking boy with a tenor voice, and a great future before him for all to see—he was a marvellous bait. How hungrily would they have swallowed him, if they had the chance. But they did not get it. John was in good hands. And, for all his youth and lack of experience, he had strength and character.

An incident which happened about this time is worth telling for the credit which it does the people concerned.

John came one evening to Sir John Murray Scott, his face pale and drawn.

'Why, Mac,' cried Sir John. 'What's wrong? No bad news from home?'

'No, thank God.'

'Well, then—?'

'Sir John. I hate this: but I can't help myself. I'm in the devil of a hole, and I've no one I can come to, only yourself. Can you lend me three hundred pounds? I give you my world I'll pay you back in three months' time.'

Sir John slowly shook his head.

'No, Mac. I'm sorry—but I make it a rule never to lend money. It only means one loses one's friends.'

John took the blow standing.

'I see, Sir John. Forgive me for asking you.'

The unhappiness in his face, combined with a real dignity, did something to Sir John. He made up his mind.

'Mac. I'll break my rule.'

He went over to his desk, and wrote the cheque.

'Here you are.'

There were tears in John's eyes as he protested his gratitude, and reiterated his promise to repay.

Sir John was shamefaced as he told his sister of his broken rule, but she warmly backed him up.

'I've never taken a chance so willingly,' said Sir John.
'I'll stake everything on him.'

Miss Scott noted the date in her diary. The weeks went by, and at last the day drew near. On the evening before, she reminded her brother that the repayment was due next day. Sir John sighed.

'It'll break my heart if he fails. I'm fond of that boy. I'd have given him the money willingly—only it's not right.'

Next morning, at breakfast, there was no letter. Brother and sister looked at each other.

'There's time yet,' said Miss Scott: but it was with heavy hearts that they went about their day's business.

Then, at lunch time, there was a letter on the table in John's handwriting, with the cheque inside. He had kept his word.

'Good boy,' said Sir John. 'Good boy.'

Of the many friends whom this first autumn season at Covent Garden brought John, one was outstanding. That was Lewis Waller. The two men were held together by

a strong mutual admiration. Waller had a beautiful voice, which he used with great skill. His diction was a model, and in straight romantic parts he was one of the finest actors that have graced the English stage. His Henry V, his D'Artagnan, his Beaucaire, his Brutus were all distinguished by a straightforward attack and a fire of inward nobility.

Waller's acting roused John to instant sympathy and admiration. The actor in turn was so susceptible to music that certain tunes and certain songs brought tears to his eyes. Thus each had it in his power to give pleasure to the other, and Waller's gentleness was a perfect foil to John's impetuosity.

Once, a few years later, when both Waller and John were on tour in Australia, they met at Brisbane. After each had done his evening's work, they met for supper with Madge Titheradge. Actor and singer discussed everything under the sun that had to do with music and drama, joining issue at last on the question whether a beautiful voice in speech could make as strong an appeal to an audience as a beautiful voice in song. Each clung tenaciously to his own side. John, to prove his point, moved Waller to tears by singing 'Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes': Waller, as soon as he had recovered his composure, retorted by speaking Lytton's poem about the priest, and so moved John that he became speechless.

But John adds that Waller was always moved by 'Drink to Me only,' even if it was played by a bad 'cellist in a teashop.

That first season, Lily invited Waller to go to a matinée of *La Traviata* in which John was singing Alfredo to the Violetta of a famous prima donna—not Tetrazzini.

This lady's powers as an actress were very limited, although she had a high opinion of them. She was of large stature, and, in order to secure the required consumptive

appearance for the last act, she used the full resources of her make-up box.

After the opera John eagerly asked Lewis what he thought of the performance.

The actor praised his singing very highly, but, 'strangely enough,' as John says, was somewhat critical of his acting.

'And what did you think of *Violetta*?' John asked him.

'She sang like an angel. But, good God, John, what did she do to herself in the last act? Stick her face in a flour bag?'

John sang *Traviata* with the lady many times after that, but never again dared look at her face during that scene in the last act.

vii

John had been engaged by Arthur Boosey for the whole of the 1907–8 series of Ballad Concerts, and Boosey suggested to him that he might like to pick a new ballad and introduce it himself.

John was only too willing. He began looking around for something to suit him, but could not find anything he liked. Then, one day, there walked into his lodgings in Torrington Square Charles Marshall, whom he had first met as accompanist at the Sunday Supper Concerts at the Queen's Hotel, Leicester Square.

As a result of these concerts, Marshall had taken a liking to John, and had asked if he could one day show him some of his own songs. John was immensely flattered, for Marshall was not only a pet pupil of Sir Arthur Sullivan, but had been accompanist to the great tenor Joseph Maas.

So he made Marshall very welcome. Marshall sat down at the upright piano in the parlour and played a song which he had just finished. The words were by Tom



ON HIS FIRST HARRISON TOUR IN 1908

Moore, which gave them an immediate passport to John's liking, but made him doubly critical of the setting. Marshall's setting he liked immensely. It was called 'A Child's Song,' and John was to sing it many times, and to make of it one of the records he considers his best.

Marshall next played a setting of Shelley's 'Sensitive Plant,' which John still thinks is one of the finest songs ever written. If only some foreigner had written it, he maintains it would have been hailed at once.

'Have you any other songs?' he asked, when he had finished saying how good he thought the 'Sensitive Plant.'

'I have one,' Marshall answered. 'But, though I like it very much myself, none of the publishers will touch it.'

He pulled the much handled manuscript from his pocket, propped it up on the piano, and started to play.

John hummed it through softly. When he came to the last verse he sang the opening phrase *mezza voce*, rising to the high A natural with wonderful beauty of tone. He admired the note himself, but was not at all prepared for its effect on the composer.

'Good Lord!' shouted Marshall. 'That is the exact sound I want on that note. Come on, John. Sing it again.'

And John sang again 'I Hear You Calling Me.'

It was too late to see Boosey that afternoon, but next morning the pair rushed off bright and early to his office. They rushed up the stairs, and, as soon as John got his breath back, he shouted, 'Mr. Boosey, Mr. Boosey! We have it.'

'You have what?' cried the bewildered publisher.

'We have the finest song ever published by the house of Boosey.'

The bewilderment was wiped off in a flash, and Boosey fired off questions like a Gatling gun.

'What do you call it?' he demanded. 'When was it written? When did you hear it, John? Is the accompaniment

difficult? Is it a one-man song, or can all tenors sing it? What is the compass? Can you transpose it for baritones and basses? Can women sing it? Has it sales value?'

Instead of answering, Marshall pulled the manuscript from his pocket, and John sang 'I Hear You Calling Me' for Arthur Boosey.

Boosey was charmed with the song. He felt convinced that John could make a big personal success with it, but he was a little doubtful about its sales value.

'Let me sing it at the next Ballad Concert,' John pleaded.

'Certainly,' Boosey replied. 'I will put it in the hands of the printers at once, and I hope, for both your sakes as well as our own, that the song will be the success you believe.'

Actually, John did not sing the song till March 1908. Marshall accompanied him, and the song was a huge success. It has remained identified with John's name from that day to this, and his record of it has sold far more copies than any other he made.

VIII

At the end of 1907 John returned to Dublin, with all the laurels of his success at Covent Garden, and on Wednesday, the 4th of December, he had a tremendous reception at the Rotunda. The press was delirious next day, and his old friends were both delighted and amazed by the progress he had made. His voice was stronger, particularly in the upper register, and he sang with far greater finish and assurance.

So a great year ended fittingly with a triumph amongst his own people; and, much though his London success meant to him, no plaudits could sound as sweetly in John's ears as those from his native land.

CHAPTER 6

IMMEDIATELY ON HIS return to London, John was signed up for a tour of the provinces by Percy Harrison of Birmingham.

This extraordinary man was probably the most picturesque figure in the whole history of concert giving in England. Smallish, spare, with a high complexion, long side whiskers, and very little hair, Harrison dressed with the utmost neatness and precision. His voice was high pitched, and he spoke at a tremendous speed. He had twinkling, kindly eyes, which were a real indication of his character, for he cared for all his artists as if they had been his children.

Daddy Harrison, as they all called him, was the father of all 'International Celebrity Concerts.' His concerts were never so described—they were called simply 'Harrison Concerts'—but the stars of his tours were always 'International Celebrities.' He had no need to advertise the claim. It was taken for granted by his devoted subscribers. The artists naturally raised no objection to being thus described, and everybody was happy.

The Company generally consisted of four singers, with a solo violinist or pianist. Hard things have been said of these tours and their like, but John defends them stoutly.

'I guarantee,' he said, 'that the artistic level of the Harrison Concerts was as high as that of any International Celebrity Concerts since, whilst from a purely vocal point of view the singing was superior. My dear old friend,

Harold Holt, who has done wonders for music in England, may shout "Ingrate" at me, but, after all, I set out to say what I think, and I give my opinion for what it is worth.'

John's first Harrison tour opened in Birmingham. The Company consisted of Albani, Marie Stuart, Dalton Baker the baritone, John, and Marie Novello the pianist. When they arrived at Euston station, Daddy Harrison was ready to greet them at the door of their private saloon. In every hotel they found their rooms already engaged, and they had a sort of communal sitting-room.

This might have been a severe test for all concerned: but an extraordinary feature of Harrison tours was that the artists invariably got on happily together. They became a real family under Daddy's paternal care, and learned not only to know but to love one another. In the sitting-room, whoever wanted to write letters wrote them; whoever wanted to read read, sometimes to the tune of a Chopin *scherzo* played with the soft pedal down, or to the dronings of a muted violin.

'During all my Harrison tours,' John says, 'I never heard a word spoken in anger among us artists. Of course, we had heated arguments about the taste of the audience and their power to estimate what was what—always, of course, depending on the applause which was given to the Protagonists of the argument, if you know what I mean: but we were always one happy family.'

The tour was a great success, and the press notices enthusiastic. In every case John was picked out, and it says much for the family spirit referred to that this caused no disharmony with his colleagues. Once or twice when the baritone was indisposed his place was taken by that distinguished singer, Ivor Foster. In the same way, Marie Novello was more than once replaced by Vera Margolies. This made no difference to the general harmony.

John sang arias from *Faust* and *La Bohème*: two or three of Marshall's songs, including 'A Child's Song' of Moore, and 'I Hear You Calling Me'; and several Irish songs. At one concert he gave 'The Prize Song' from the *Meistersinger*, and was called upon to sing 'The Flower Song' from *Carmen* twice.

Madame Albani was well past her prime by this time, but her name still meant a great deal, and to be a member of her company was an excellent introduction to the audiences of the midlands and the north. All were sorry when the tour was over, but John had no time for regrets. He had to start rehearsals at once for the Grand Season at Covent Garden.

II

For this Grand Season, no fewer than ten British singers were engaged. Their names are an interesting commentary on the shortness of a singer's fame. The ladies were Dilys Jones, Caroline Hatchard, Maud Santley, Lenora Sparkes, Phyllis Archibald, Kirkby Lunn, and Edna Thornton. The men, badly outnumbered, were John, Walter Hyde, and Robert Radford.

Of the ladies' names, only those of the two contraltos, Kirkby Lunn and Edna Thornton, mean much to-day. Both were great favourites, and were to sing for many years to come. Kirkby Lunn had a beautiful silken voice, effortlessly used, though she was sometimes lazy in her attack upon a high note. She was unexcelled in music of a noble or plangent kind—I shall never forget her singing of Gounod's 'Entreat Me not to Leave Thee'—but she was not altogether a pleasant colleague to work with. Edna

Thornton had a voice of glorious power, most naturally produced. It took her into the highest company, but her singing lacked subtlety and finish. Dilys Jones and Caroline Hatchard made considerable reputations, and their names are remembered by amateurs of singing, but that is all.

Kirkby Lunn and Edna Thornton were prolific makers of gramophone records, but hardly any of these survive in the catalogues of to-day. Edna Thornton takes part in a quartet or two, Kirkby Lunn can be heard in one or two solo records and a duet with John. Of the men, Walter Hyde, a steady and excellent tenor with a sympathetic voice, has not a single record left to his name. John assures me he was one of the best Siegmunds he ever heard. Robert Radford is a little more fortunate, but even he is badly represented now. Gifted with a noble voice, and excelling in dignified rôles (his Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* was unforgettable), he was for many years the acknowledged leader among British basses, and was later to be one of the props of the British National Opera. John says of him, 'I always thought he deserved a knighthood.'

Of them all, John was to make by far the greatest name in his profession.

III

The presiding genius and the social inspiration of the Grand Season in those far Edwardian days was the beautiful and gentle Lady de Grey, afterwards Marchioness of Ripon. She was a woman of exquisite beauty, and her beauty was equalled by her charm. An excellent amateur musician, she showed the singers every kindness, and received from them a devotion commanded by no one else.

Throughout the Grand Season she gave, every Sunday evening, a musical party at her home, Coombe Court, at Kingston. To these parties she invited the chief singers from the opera. These occasions were a sheer joy. The parties were informal, the singers were her guests, and their only hope was to give as much pleasure to their hostess's friends as they themselves received.

To John, she was not only the greatest society figure of the time, but an inspiration. He recalls particularly an evening when she spoke to him of Jean de Reszke.

'McCormack,' she said, 'if you never heard Jean, whether as Lohengrin, Romeo, Siegfried, or Walter von Stolzing, you missed the greatest vocal treat of all time. At least, that is what I think. As for his Tristan—there are no words to describe it.'

The outstanding evening at Coombe Court John had the great honour of singing before Queen Alexandra. The Queen sat beside Lady de Grey, on a settee quite near the piano, and listened with rapt attention to the music. John's fellow-artists were Maggie Teyte and Gilibert. Maggie Teyte was an exquisite singer, who to John's mind sang French songs better than any French singer he ever heard, with the possible exception of Edmond Clement. Her soprano voice was extraordinarily sympathetic in quality.

Gilibert, a mountain of a man, had a light baritone voice of lovely quality, which he used with exquisite delicacy in old French *chansons*. On the operatic stage he was chiefly known for his rendering of the father in *Louise*. Gilibert's enormous bulk brought into relief the delicacy of his work.

Among his songs John sang 'I Hear You Calling Me,' which was now popular everywhere. After he had finished, Lady de Grey told him that the Queen wished to speak with him. His knees knocked like a nigger minstrel's bones as he approached, but the Queen's smile was so charming that at once she put him at his ease.

She made him sit beside her, and then asked him how he produced the soft A natural on the word 'calling.' John did his best to explain. (As a matter of fact, he does not know.)

'I am a little hard of hearing,' Queen Alexandra said. 'In the Albert Hall I can scarcely hear a brass band. But I could hear that note with perfect distinctness.'

John has always treasured that compliment.

IV

The season went on, and John consolidated his position with every opera he sang. Then, one morning at rehearsal, a buzz of excitement ran round. The artists were told, unofficially at first, that there would be a gala performance by Royal Command, in honour of the visit of the President of the French Republic.

At once the singers broke up into little groups to discuss the possible programme. Would it be all French or all Italian? Would there be some German opera in it? Which singers would be invited to take part?

There was, however, no 'leakage of information,' so they had to be as patient as they could until the official announcement that the gala performance would be held on May the 27th.

To this generation a gala performance by Royal Command at Covent Garden can mean very little. In Edwardian days they were gala performances indeed. During his eight seasons at Covent Garden, John sang in three. He insists on describing the first occasion himself.

'Covent Garden Opera House lent itself wonderfully for such performances. The house was a mass of the most

life-like artificial roses I ever saw anywhere. There was nothing glaring about the colour scheme. All was more or less in pastel shades. Four boxes in the centre of the grand tier were thrown into one to form the Royal Box. The scene from the opera house itself was glorious, but from the stage, when the house was full, the uniforms of the men and the gorgeous dresses and jewels of the ladies made a panorama unforgettable in its effect.'

Everyone knew, even the singers, that on these nights the music came a bad second. Yet the whole performance was timed as carefully as a broadcast is to-day, and John noted with surprise that at the three galas in which it was his luck to appear, there never was a variation of more than five minutes between the time taken at the dress rehearsal and the actual performance. This was a remarkable feat, for the intervals, and the time for changing the scenes, were included in the schedule.

The programme of John's first Royal Command performance was as follows:

- Part 1.* Act 1 of *I Pescatori di Perle*, by Georges Bizet, with Tetrazzini, Sammarco, and John.
Part 2. The Garden Scene from *Faust*, with Melba, Zenatello, and Vanni Marcoux.

The presence of the two great rival sopranos gave an extra touch of excitement to the occasion. John himself has never thought there was any comparison between their voices. They were entirely different in character and in quality, Tetrazzini being a coloratura soprano pure and simple, and Melba a lyric soprano who could sing certain coloratura parts, such as Lucia di Lammermoor. John's opinion of their merits may be coloured by the fact that, at the time he met them, Tetrazzini was at the peak of her career, and Melba, though still singing with lovely tone, was well past her best.

But each prima donna had a legion of fans, and the battle raged unceasingly between them.

Of his own performance John can remember very little. As usual, he was terribly nervous. When Sammarco and he entered the stage, they were blinded by the reflection of the lights on the gorgeous breastplate of diamonds worn by the Gaekwar of Baroda. Pulling themselves together, the pair sang the beautiful duet from the first act of Bizet's opera very well, although not nearly as well as they had sung it at the general rehearsal. This fact did not escape Prince Francis of Teck, who told them both as much very frankly the day after.

'Prince Francis was beloved by all us artists. It was his custom to come back-stage and tell us candidly what he thought of our performances. He was an excellent critic, incidentally. He enjoyed our reactions, and we were flattered by his very kind interest in our work. Why shouldn't we be?'

It was a delight to John to meet Sammarco once more. The Italian was progressing with his English, and could now speak it fluently, but he could never master the pronunciation sufficiently to sing it well, and he complained that it was an accursed language in which it was impossible to sing. He still relied on John for his English lessons, and was to do so for several years to come.

v

At this point I intruded with a question which John must often have heard before.

'How do the singers of to-day compare with those of 1908?'

John looked at me.

'To be perfectly frank,' he said, 'with a few exceptions, they don't compare at all. I know, of course, that distance lends enchantment to the view; and years, to the ears. All the same, I'm convinced that in singing we have gone off the gold standard. It's not to be wondered at. The attitude of the modern student towards the art of singing is completely different from that of the student in my days. We have fine singers to-day: Flagstad the magnificent, Rethberg, Melchior, Tauber, Pinza, John Charles Thomas, and Lawrence Tibbett—but where are the Melbas, the Terninas, the Schumann-Heinks? Where is there anyone to set beside Caruso, or Plançon, or Battistini, or Jean de Reszke? Damn it, man, there's no comparison.'

'I'll tell you something more. Broadcasting has had a terrible effect on singing. I have never been an admirer of power as power in a voice, though I have been thrilled to the marrow when Caruso poured forth that stream of golden tone in *Aida* or *Gioconda* or *La Juive*. He was unique and glorious. But, leaving him on one side, considered as sound, I prefer a purely lyrical voice to a dramatic voice. Damn it all, what is mere volume? I'll never forget a remark made by my good friend Bill Thorner, to one of his pupils. (Bill is an excellent teacher, by the way.) This pupil's ambition when he started "to take vocal," as they call it in America, was to learn to sing terrific top notes. You're right—he was a tenor. Bill tried to tell him that he should strive for quality rather than quantity. The young man couldn't see it.'

"My God," roared Bill at him at last. "Wouldn't you rather be a canary than a cow?"

'But to-day, since broadcasting has come, you can never tell whether a voice is lyrical or dramatic. In fact you can't tell whether it's a voice at all. The thinnest of pipey little feminine squeaks can be made to sound like a Ta-

magno by electric energy over a loud speaker, and a *pianissimo* can be produced by manipulating some blasted gadget in the control room. The young singer of to-day doesn't have to study for years to acquire a vocal technique. All he needs is microphone technique—whatever that may be. I don't know how long it takes him to acquire that.

'Oh no, I am not going to make a fool of myself and pretend that radio hasn't done some wonderful things for music. It has, of course. It has brought the great orchestral masterpieces into the home, played under the finest conductors, giants like Toscanini and Stokowski. It has given us, specially in America, superb performances of such operas as *Valkyrie* and *Tristan* and the *Meistersinger*. My only quarrel with it is its effect on the art of singing.'

'One thing more. Nowadays everyone seems to suffer from the imitation mania. The ambition of the young singers of to-day seems to be that they should be claimed as a second somebody-or-other. You have only got to listen-in for five minutes to some record of a successful popular song, and it is almost impossible to tell who's the original and who's the imitator.'

'I don't know that that comes too well from you, John,' I put in unkindly. 'Who was called the Irish Caruso?'

He sat up on the sofa with a jump. 'I didn't call myself that. That was the newspapers.'

'Who ragged one of his own records, and found in it imitations of Caruso and De Lucia?'

He turned to Bernard Brophy, who was looking on and laughing.

'Will ye listen to this ould devil of a fella! Anyway, there's degree in all things. Why, only the other day I heard an otherwise sane young Englishman, a tenor, imitating my good friend Richard Tauber, even to the extent of putting in a foreign accent. And as for the singers who affect an Irish accent—'

The law of the land will not permit me to set down what John said about them.

'One singer in America,' he said, when the air had cleared, 'amused me more than all the rest put together. He not only sang with an Irish accent. He went so far as to change his good honest German name to an Irish one.'

He heaved round suddenly and glared at me. 'I believe ye've been pulling my leg—just to draw me out.'

I protested that I had only asked for information, but he was not mollified until Brophy and I began discussing the records we possessed of the singers during the 1908 season, and asking him questions about them.

VI

In the middle of the season, Lily had her second child, a daughter, 'our beloved Gwen.' It was the last stroke of good fortune needed to make the season memorable. By the end of 1908 John's position was secure as one of Great Britain's principal tenors.

'Sure,' he says, 'it was a grand season altogether.'

VII

During this Grand Season, on the thirtieth of May, a concert took place with a programme so remarkable that it is worth giving in full. That John should be invited to take part in it is a sufficient tribute to the reputation he had already made. The charity was in aid of the League

of Mercy. It was held at the Albert Hall, and invitations were issued by the Prince and Princess of Wales. The programme is given below.

Overture . . .	'The Meistersinger' . . .	<i>Wagner</i>
THE ROYAL AMATEUR ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY		
Conductor—Mr. ERNEST FORD		
'Othello' Fantasia . . .	Violin	<i>Ernst</i>
	Mr. EFREM ZIMBALIST	
Song	'My heart is weary' .	<i>Goring-Thomas</i>
	Miss EDNA THORNTON	
Cavatina	'Barbiere'	<i>Rossini</i>
	Signor SAMMARCO	
Jewel Song	'Faust'	<i>Gounod</i>
	Madame DONALDA	
Aria	Violoncello	<i>Bach</i>
	Monsieur HOLLMAN	
Recitative and Aria	'Jephtha'	<i>Handel</i>
	Mr. BEN DAVIES	
Suite	'L'Arlésienne'	<i>Bizet</i>
THE ROYAL AMATEUR ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY		
Song	'Maid of Athens'	<i>Gounod</i>
	Sir CHARLES SANTLEY	
Song	'Lo! Here the gentle lark'	<i>Bishop</i>
	Madame MELBA	
	(<i>Flute Obbligato</i> —Mr. A. FRANSELLA)	
(a) 'Arioso'	('Pagliacci')	<i>Leoncavallo</i>
(b) 'La mia canzone'		<i>Tosti</i>
	Signor CARUSO	

'Habañera'	(‘Carmen’)	. . . . .	Bizet
	Madame MARIA GAY		
Prologo	(‘Pagliacci’)	. . .	Leoncavallo
	Signor SCOTTI		
Song	‘Ah! Moon of my Delight’.	Liza Lebmann	
	(‘Persian Garden’)		
	Mr. JOHN McCORMACK		
Quartette	(‘Rigoletto’)	. . . . .	Verdi
Madame MELBA, Miss THORNTON, Signor CARUSO,			
Signor SCOTTI			
March	(‘Tannhäuser’)	. . . .	Wagner
THE ROYAL AMATEUR ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY			

Accompanists:

Signor TOSTI, Signor BARALDI, Mr. HAMILTON
HARTY, and Mr. LANDON RONALD

Seldom can such an assembly have appeared on a single platform. Zimbalist had not yet reached the peak of his reputation, but the purity and sweetness of his tone were everywhere acknowledged. He was later to marry that exquisite singer, Alma Gluck, and to record with her many beautiful examples of two minds working as one. Donalda was at the height of her fame, Hollman, the 'cellist, had a European reputation, and Ben Davies was in the full maturity of his powers. Incidentally, John has told me that the middle notes of Ben Davies's voice were among the most beautiful he ever heard in his life.

Santley was, of course, an old man, but he showed that the invitation to take part in the concert was no compliment paid out of compassion to the great light of an earlier generation. Albert Fransella, who played the obbligato for Melba, was the virtuoso flautist of his time; and Maria Gay had the year before startled London with the passion and realism of her Carmen.

And the accompanists! It was altogether an astounding

programme, and John's pride at taking part in it may well be understood.

One incident is worth remark. Santley, having sung his song, came round and sat with the other artists to hear Caruso. As Caruso's voice filled the hall, the old man's handsome features were disfigured by a sneer.

'Huh!' he exclaimed. 'So they call *that* singing nowadays.'

No one took any notice. Santley looked right and left under his bushy white eyebrows, and repeated the remark.

John was at the height of his hero-worship of Caruso, and his Irish blood boiled up. He turned on the old man.

'Yes,' he said, 'we call that singing. What do you call it?' Santley chuckled malevolently.

'Yelling,' he said. 'Yelling, my boy. That's what I call it.'

'Well,' retorted John, 'I like yelling.'

And he turned his back on the old baritone, who went on sneering and muttering to himself until Caruso had finished.

Fortunately, John cooled down speedily. Moral indignation is as bad for the voice as it is for the digestion.

A further feature of interest about this concert is that the design on the cover of the programme bears the signature of Ernest Thesiger.

Another concert, within four days of this one, had a cast very nearly as distinguished. It was given at the Queen's Hall to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Wilhelm Ganz. Out of compliment to him, Patti made one of her rare returns to the concert platform. She sang '*Voi che sapete*' from *Figaro*, Tosti's '*La Serenata*', and was joined in '*La ci darem*' by no less a partner than Edouard de Reszke. Other contributors to the programme were Donalda, Ben Davies, Ada Crossley, Mischa Elman, Marie Tempest, Irene Vanbrugh, Lewis Waller, and George Grossmith. John sang '*Celeste Aida*'.

This season brought John a further honour, that of singing in front of King Edward. The King came often to Covent Garden, where he would sit in the corner of the Omnibus Box, behind the side curtain, out of sight of the audience, with his friends the Marquis de Soveral and Baron Rothschild.

King Edward's taste ran to the simple operas. The only instrument he tried to play himself was the banjo. This he played very well, according to his tutor, Alfred Cammeyer, who shared with Olly Oakley the distinction of being the greatest virtuoso of the time.

John's first appearance before the King was at the American Embassy, which was then at Dorchester House, on the site of the present Dorchester Hotel. It was a magnificent house with majestic rooms and beautiful pictures. The Ambassador at that time, Whitelaw Reid, was a man of almost unlimited wealth. His physical appearance was splendid, and he carried himself with great dignity. He lived up to the house, and the house lived up to him.

Three artists were engaged to give an hour of music. America was represented by Lilian Nordica, a superb singer and a very beautiful woman. John appeared for Great Britain, and Hollman, the 'cellist, was there because everybody loved him.

When the artists reached the ante-room to make ready for their performances, there was a regular babble of conversation. Through it all could be heard the voice of the King. It was rather guttural, and he spoke with a strong German accent. John peeped into the room. Queen Alexandra was sitting in the front row, looking radiant, with all the other ladies grouped beside and behind her. At the back, leaning against a pillar, stood King Edward, in animated conversation with de Soveral.

It was John's turn to come on first. He made his entrance, and stood on the little raised dais, followed by Freddie Sewell, the accompanist. The babble subsided, but a low rumble went on still, oddly muffled, like an argument carried on behind thick curtains.

John sang '*Che gelida manina*' from *La Bohème*. The continuous obbligato of muffled speech, instead of annoying him, suddenly struck him as funny. It became an agony not to burst out laughing. He had to make the greatest effort to concentrate, but just managed to hold himself in until he reached the ante-room, where he burst into guffaws which almost scared the gentle Nordica out of her wits.

The King had applauded louder and longer than anybody, though obviously he had not listened to a note.

John threw back his head and laughed again at the memory.

'As a matter of fact,' he said, 'my sympathies were all with the King. It must be awful to have to stay in a room and listen to music which at the best entertains you mildly, and at the worst interferes with an important conversation.'

'Nordica had much the same experience, but I shall never forget her singing of Schumann's "*Der Nussbaum*" that famous evening. I have never heard any singer come within leagues of it.'

John sang for a second time before the King this same summer. The occasion was a concert he gave at the Albert Hall for the sufferers of the Messina earthquake. Sir John Murray Scott was chairman of the committee in charge, and the King and Queen acceded to his request to be the patrons of the concert. A little while later, they announced that they would be pleased to attend it.

Queen Alexandra came at the beginning. Half-way through the programme, a messenger came in frantic haste

from Sir John Murray Scott, bidding John come immediately to the front door, as the King was arriving.

John reached the foyer puffing like a porpoise, speechless, and shaking with fright. Sir John presented him to the King. John's tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth, but he got it unstuck at last, and managed to thank the King for his gracious presence.

The King nodded.

'Please go back and tell the orchestra not to play "God Save the King,"' he said. 'I want to slip into the box quietly and unnoticed.'

John clicked his heels like a Prussian subaltern, and rushed back to Landon Ronald to tell him the King's wishes. Ronald raised his eyebrows in surprise, but obeyed; and the programme went on in due order. But the memory of those two hectic rushes still makes John short of breath whenever it comes into his mind.

CHAPTER 7

AT THE end of the Grand Season of 1908, John felt he had earned a holiday, and the family went over to Ireland. He sang at four concerts there, then had to come back to the little house in Ferncroft Avenue to prepare for the coming season.

Prominent among his engagements was one to sing at the Birmingham Festival. This festival was one of the best in England. 'The choir was superb. They sang with the utmost polish and with matchless tone. Their intonation and colour were things of joy.'

John was engaged to sing in *Elijah* and in the Manzoni *Requiem* by Verdi. The conductor of the festival was Mr. (now Sir) Henry Wood. John was not friendly disposed towards him, since Henry Wood had refused to hear him in 1906, when he was struggling to gain a hearing. John had a letter of introduction from William Ludwig, who knew Henry Wood well. Wood's reply had been that he was much too busy to hear young singers.

'But then,' as John says, 'aren't we all?'

The *Elijah* for this performance was Clarence Whitehill, the American baritone, who had made himself world famous by his singing of Wagnerian rôles. Whitchill was a handsome giant, a magnificent specimen of manhood. His *Elijah* was intensely dramatic. In the oratorio there comes a point when the second tenor, Ahab, has to reproach *Elijah* and blame him for the condition of affairs. The second tenor on this occasion was small even for a tenor; and when Whitehill turned upon him with the full

power of his voice and sang the phrase 'No, it is thou, Ahab, and all thy father's house,' poor little Ahab nearly fell off the platform.

The performance of Verdi's *Requiem*, however, had no comic relief. The quartet consisted of Aino Ackté, soprano; Muriel Foster, mezzo-soprano; John, tenor; and Clarence Whitehill, baritone. John has never forgotten the perfectly exquisite singing of Muriel Foster. From every point of view, in tone, and phrasing, it belonged to the aristocracy of song. He has always believed that Muriel Foster was the greatest singer England ever produced. It was a tragedy that she retired so early.

On paper this quartet seemed to promise an excellent performance. The promise was not fulfilled, and the soprano was to blame. Madame Ackté was an operatic soprano *pur sang*, and a most excellent one. She had created the part of Salomé in Strauss's opera at Dresden the year before; but, although the Verdi music is operatic in style, Madame Ackté was completely at sea. It might almost be said that she was still at sea, for her intonation was affected by a bad Channel crossing the day before. For that she was hardly to blame; but she did not know her part. In one place, where the others had to sing changing harmonies under a supposed E flat sustained through three or four bars, the result was more like Stravinski than Verdi.

John himself was never very enthusiastic about his own singing in the *Requiem*, especially the *Ingemisco*. The bass part was too low for Clarence Whitehill, though he sang the *Confutatis* beautifully.

In the artists' room afterwards the singers were looking at each other and saying, with little conviction, 'Well, it wasn't so bad,' when suddenly the door was flung open, and in walked a distinguished, soldierly-looking man with a splendid head and finely carved features. He had a magnificent flowing moustache, and it was bristling with in-

dignation. He went straight up to Muriel Foster, and said in a voice loud enough for all to hear, 'That is the worst performance of Verdi's *Requiem* I ever heard.'

The singers knew it was none of the best, but John resented this criticism. He turned to Whitehill.

'Who the hell is this major-general?' he demanded, 'and what does he mean by rushing in here and giving his opinion unasked?'

'Good heavens,' Whitehill replied, 'that's no general! That's Sir Edward Elgar.'

John did not know whether to be more angry or less. All knew who was to blame for the performance, and he replied sulkily, 'He should not put us all in the same category.'

It soon became evident that he did not. Madame Ackté came forward smiling, and asked Muriel Foster to introduce her to the great composer. Elgar barely acknowledged the introduction. He nodded coldly, and would not shake hands. Ackté burst into tears.

This increased John's resentment. He went on fuming and grumbling, despite Whitehill's attempts to soothe him.

'After all,' said the baritone, 'Sir Edward Elgar ought to know something about music.'

'He may that,' John replied truculently, 'but thank God his music is better than his manners!'

And he nursed a prejudice which lasted until he next met Elgar, nearly twenty-seven years afterwards. This was at the Albert Hall, at a benefit concert for the Musicians' Benevolent Fund. John was presented to Elgar by a great friend of them both, the late Sir Landon Ronald. He reminded Elgar of the performance in Birmingham—only to find that Elgar had forgotten all about his objections, and remembered it only for Muriel Foster's lovely singing.

At once John's resentment melted away, and he felt that gush of warm feeling which always follows the removal

of a negative emotion. He told Elgar of the joy his *Dream of Gerontius* gave him, whether he sang in it or listened to it.

'Elgar was courteous and kindly as only an English gentleman can be. We drank a glass of champagne, which was strictly forbidden by his doctor, to our newborn friendship; and I am indeed proud to say it lasted until he died.'

He looked at me over the tops of his glasses.

'Elgar was one of the best story-tellers I have ever heard. He had an impish sense of humour. He was the soul of simplicity. He had no false ideas about his music, and had very definite ideas as to how it should be sung and played. Oh, yes, very definite ideas they were, as many of my colleagues who have performed with him and knew him can testify.'

'Once I had the great joy of going through the *Dream* with him at Mary Anderson's home in Broadway. I had sung it in America many times, and had got into little habits of my own in several places. Elgar pulled me up on every one of them, and insisted on his own phrasing, and especially on his own tempo.'

'The *Dream of Gerontius* is and always will be one of my favourite works. I love to sing it, but I think I love even better listening to it. Some of the Smart Alecks among the music critics have said it smelt of incense. So be it. I feel sure, as a Catholic, that the cloud of incense from Elgar's thurible still ascends before the throne of the Great Inspirer, to thank Him for the gift He bestowed on that great soul.'

John has many memories of Elgar. One night, after an Elgar concert given by the B.B.C. Orchestra at the Queen's Hall, during which the composer had conducted his second symphony, he came to a little supper which John gave for him. After supper, he began telling reminiscences of his early days in Worcester. He told how one day he took a

position as teacher of the violin at a school, so that he could buy a special Christmas present for ‘my darling Alice.’ But the school collapsed, and Elgar could not buy the gift.

Next he described how he jotted down the melody of ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ as he was walking by the bank of a river in search of the wary trout; and how, during the war of 1914–18, he heard it sung in pitch darkness in an underground station at Finchley Road during an air-raid.

When he had finished talking, Elgar sat down at the piano and began to strum. John interrupted to ask him whether he had ever written an opera.

Elgar turned in surprise.

‘That’s odd,’ he exclaimed. ‘I was thinking about it at that very moment. But, Count John, it will never be performed. Here is the principal tenor aria.’

He played it, a typical Elgar melody, lying very high. It was in the key of G Major, and John ventured the opinion that it would be more singable in G flat, a favourite key of his.

Elgar disagreed, as John knew he would. He liked the key of G, and the aria sounded more brilliant in that key.

Some months afterwards, John received a letter from him, in which he said he thought that perhaps, after all, the aria would be better in G flat. It went on, ‘Why didn’t I remember my Meyerbeer?’

‘Great musician, large-hearted gentleman, I am proud that he called me friend.’

II

After the Birmingham Festival, John was engaged by the Welsh Choral Society in Liverpool to sing in Handel’s

Samson. The less said about this performance the better. Suffering from a rare attack of self-satisfaction, John did not study the part as well as he might. Disaster was averted only by the quick wit and the voice of the conductor, Harry Evans.

In the big duet with Herbert Brown, the bass, John went to pieces. He was utterly lost, when Evans came to his rescue and took up the cue. The line was 'Go, baffled coward, go!' and John, with his guilty conscience, felt that Evans sang it with special emphasis and point. If he could have run from the platform, he would have.

As he was going out of the hall, a lady said to her friend that she was terribly disappointed in the tenor. The tenor did not argue the point.

Chastened by this salutary experience, John determined never again to tackle a part he had not thoroughly studied. As if in reward, he was offered a tour of five concerts with a great artist, who was to have the profoundest influence on his life and work. The tour on which he first met Fritz Kreisler stands out in his mind above every other. It failed financially, but it was of inestimable value. From that day Kreisler has been his best critic and his best friend. The advice and the criticism he received from the violinist at those few concerts did more for his work than anything before or since.

Kreisler from the first was a great master of rhythm and phrasing as well as tone. From him John learned not only the secret of that clean attack which characterized his mature singing, but the 'forward' rhythm—I do not know how else to describe it—which kept his vocal line always alive, and made every song move from the first bar to the last. There are singers, and singers with beautiful voices, who seem to be always starting again. Every time a rest is marked in their score, the song or aria stops dead, to be begun once more when their next cue comes. John never

had this failing, but from Kreisler he learned to better his natural gift for rhythm, and, as Plunket Greene used to put it, to 'sing through the rests.'

In the years to come, John and Kreisler were to make many gramophone records together. A number of these still remain in the catalogue. They reveal an astonishing collaboration, a similarity of tone as well as of phrasing. If anyone wants to hear collaboration of this kind at its highest, I recommend the short record which both made of Herbert Hughes's setting of Moore's 'I Saw from the Beach.' In this record Kreisler's 'forward' rhythm is matched by John's, and the subtlety of the singer's phrasing can only be appreciated by a careful listener—though anyone will be obliged to sit up and take notice, if he puts on, after this record, any other record of the same air.

Besides tone and phrasing, the two artists shared a characteristic which has puzzled many of their admirers and exasperated many musicians. While completely responsive to the highest in music, and authoritative in their performance of it, they perform with apparent conviction works of a level so different that some musicians deny them the name of music at all. Most Kreisler recitals include *morceaux* and pretty trifles: most McCormack recitals include a group of drawing-room ballads and encores of no musical interest. This quality in John I hope to discuss fully in Chapter 12. For whatever reasons, Kreisler has it too—as he shares the singer's extraordinary power of disinfecting these dubious, false, or over-simple works; of desentimentalizing them, and making them for the moment sound like music.

For examples of their austerity in performance of music easily made lush, one may cite their record of the '*Barcarolle*' from the *Tales of Hoffmann*. For perfect balance of instrument and voice, a piece which nothing can desentimentalize, Godard's '*Berceuse de Jocelyn*.' For collabora-

tion in real music, the Rachmaninov songs they recorded together in America, and Strauss's '*Morgen*'—an unusual rendering, which will not easily be superseded.

John's own opinion of Kreisler can hardly be got down in words.

'Nothing I can say can add lustre to the name of that great artist. He has always remained my ideal violinist. In fact, I have always said there are violinists and violinists, and Fritz Kreisler. No one who has not enjoyed Fritz's friendship can really estimate the man as well as the artist. One cannot imagine any field of endeavour in which he would not be a success. He has the mental equipment to fit him for any profession. Add to that his innate refinement, his heart of gold, and his musical soul, and you have Fritz Kreisler.'

III

Another joy of that season, 1908–9, was to appear in a series of concerts with Busoni. The great Italian took a fancy to the young Irishman, and after each concert they had supper together, talking to each other in Italian all the time. John was as proud as a peacock, a young singer of twenty-four hobnobbing with that giant among pianists, Ferruccio Busoni.

It was not only his reputation that attracted John. His senses were stormed by Busoni's playing. Finding John in tears one night after his playing of Chopin's C Minor Nocturne, Busoni said:

'Giovanni, come out in front, and I will play an encore for yourself.'

John went, and Busoni played Liszt's arrangement of the *Rigoletto* quartet with thrilling fire and vehemence.

When, with the audience, John called ‘Bravo,’ he received a solemn bow and a gigantic wink all to himself. The pair had a champagne supper that night.

IV

John was kept busy throughout the winter season. He was getting good fees, and altogether the prospects of the little home in Hampstead were really bright.

The McCormacks were making friends on all sides. At the old Irish Club in Charing Cross Road, John was introduced one evening to the guest of honour, the Marchese Marconi. He felt himself much honoured to meet this man of genius, and said so frankly.

Marconi said he had heard John sing at Covent Garden, and complimented him on the way he sang Italian.

‘You sing it almost as if you spoke it,’ he said.

‘I do speak it.’

Thereafter, through a long friendship, the Marchese hardly ever spoke to him in English. John found him charming.

‘He was the gentlest man I ever knew, and shy as a girl. I remember one evening sitting beside him at a dinner at which he was to speak. He never broke his fast during the whole meal. When I remarked on this, and said that by now he ought to be used to public speaking, he told me it was torture for him until he got going. Then it was fairly easy.’

Always, after that first meeting, when John was singing at Covent Garden, Marconi would come to see Lily in the interval, and say how he thought John was doing. He was a devotee of opera, and almost lived at Covent Garden during the season.

In March 1909, through the good offices of Sammarco, John was engaged to sing at the San Carlo Theatre in Naples. He grins as he speaks of it.

'I'm afraid I cannot put this engagement down as one of my major triumphs. Frankly it was not. However, I learned a great deal.'

This engagement provided John with a series of surprises. The morning after the pair had arrived, a gentleman was ushered into their suite in the Hotel Excelsior. John asked him his business, and was told that he was the *Capo del Claque*.

This was a new title to John. He asked the stranger to explain what his work was, and what it had to do with him. The *Capo* told John that 'his men' came to the opera every evening, and were engaged by the artists to applaud their singing.

John looked at him crosswise.

'I never paid anyone to applaud yet,' he said, 'and I'm not going to begin now. Sure, by the time I've paid my expenses from London to Naples and back, and my hotel expenses, I won't have a penny left to pay anybody.'

The *Capo* bowed.

'Allora, Signor Tenore,' he replied suavely. '*Lei avra un fiasco.*' (You will be a failure.)

'Well,' says John, 'I had come a long way, and I was starting my career, so I agreed to pay the claque, and was prepared to dismiss my charming friend when he said, "Now, there is the question of the newspapers."

I was completely flabbergasted. I had heard whispers of a claque in Covent Garden, although, needless to say, I had never engaged it. How could I, on fifteen pounds a week? But—to pay the musical critics! Good heavens, that was unheard of.'

However, there was nothing to do except pay up and put as good a face on it as possible. John paid for his press

notices, but neither the claque nor the subsidized press helped him. He did not make a hit in Naples.

All the same, the engagement brought one interesting encounter. On one of John's free nights, he and Lily went to the San Carlo to hear an opera called *San Giovanni Battista*. The name part was sung by the famous baritone Kaschmann, but, in spite of that, Lily and John found the opera a bore, and the evening would have been a total loss, but for one thing.

Sitting just in front of John was the tenor Fernando de Lucia. John had heard him several times at the Scala when he was a student, and had always been a very great admirer of his singing and acting.

John nudged Lily, and pointed out De Lucia with great pride. Then he listened carefully to every word which the tenor spoke to his companion.

During one of the intervals, De Lucia asked his friend what operas were to be performed during the coming week. His friend told him that the only important thing was the début of a young English tenor—i.e. John.

Eagerly John leaned forward to hear the great man's comments.

'Oh,' said De Lucia, 'let us go. At least, there will be something to laugh at.'

For a moment John felt like bursting into tears. Then his sense of humour came to the rescue.

He leaned forward and tapped De Lucia on the shoulder.

'Maestro, I am the poor devil who is making his début next week, and I hope there won't be anything to laugh at.'

De Lucia was most embarrassed, and was profuse in his apologies and explanations. When John made his début in *Rigoletto*, the great tenor came round on purpose to congratulate him.

'I loved him for it,' says John, 'but I did not feel I had earned his encomiums.'

Another evening, John and Lily were asked to a little party given by the assistant stage manager of the San Carlo. His daughter, a charming girl with beautiful liquid brown eyes, and hair in ringlets down her back, acted as hostess. The girl spoke splendid English, and made an immediate hit with Lily.

During the evening John's host drew him aside.

'Giovanni,' he said, 'I think my little girl is going to be a great singer one day. She has a lovely quality of voice, and a natural gift of song.'

John made the usual 'good wish' reply, and never gave the little girl another thought, until he came one morning in 1914 to Covent Garden for a rehearsal of Boito's *Mefistofele*. When he was introduced to the Margherita, he recognized with surprise and delight his little friend, now a lovely woman and a lovelier singer. She was Claudia Muzio, who died suddenly and tragically, at the height of her career, in 1935.

v

On their way back from the Naples engagement, Lily and John stopped in Rome. John was vividly reminded of one of the first hymns he had ever learned at school in Athlone. This was 'A Hymn to the Pope,' written for the silver jubilee of his Holiness Pope Leo XIII. It had a melody composed by Vincent O'Brien's father, and the opening lines ran thus:

Full in the panting heart of Rome
Beneath the Apostles' crowning dome,
Mid pilgrims' lips that kissed the ground
Breathes in all tongues one holy sound,
God bless our Pope, the Great, the Good.

'Now, finding ourselves "beneath the Apostles' crowning dome,'" John says, 'we were literally filled with awe. Two simple Irish Catholics in the Eternal City for the first time! I have travelled as much as most men, from London to San Francisco, from Paris to Tokio, from Cape Town to Shanghai, from Berlin to Sydney, from Prague to Quebec, but no city I have ever visited affects me as Rome does. I have been there many many times since that April in 1909, but that strange thrill remains, or rather is renewed.'

Lily and John were met in Rome by their friends the Navarros, who were perfect guides for two inexperienced travellers. They knew Rome from all the Seven Hills to the sea. Through their kindness, and through the intervention of the late Monsignor Fraser, afterwards Archbishop of Glasgow, Lily and John were received in audience by Pope Pius X. This can be told in no other words than John's.

'I shall never forget that moment when the door of the Pope's apartment opened, and we were ushered into the presence of His Holiness. The Father of Christendom rose to greet us. We genuflected before him and kissed his ring. He gently raised us to our feet. He spoke of our visit to Rome and hoped that our stay would be pleasant. He was interested in the fact that I had studied in Italy. He blessed the rosaries and crucifixes we had brought with us.

'We kneeled before him again. He placed his hands on both our heads and gave us his solemn benediction. We rose and backed from his presence.

'As he turned to go to his desk, I noted the round shoulders, the silvery white hair, a little long at the back, hanging over the collar of his white soutane, but mostly I noticed the air of deep fatigue. I could almost hear our Holy Father reciting *Nunc dimittis*.

'The door closed, and, unblushingly I confess it, I wept.

The whole episode had taken less than five minutes; but five unforgettable, sacred minutes. We had kneeled before a saint and received his blessing!'

VI

With the approach of the new Grand Season at Covent Garden, John found himself extremely busy. It was to be a momentous season for him. There were new operas to learn. He went daily to the opera house to study them with the faithful and indefatigable Waddy. Besides the operas he knew, he was to sing *Lakmé* and *The Daughter of the Regiment* with Tetrazzini. The conductor was to be Campanini. John had heard him at the Scala in Milan, and he was at the moment enjoying a triumph at the newly opened Manhattan Opera House in New York. John looked forward to the coming season in fear and trembling. Campanini was reported to be particularly stern with tenors; his brother, Italo Campanini, had been one of the greatest tenors Italy ever produced.

But when rehearsal started, John found that his fears were groundless. Cleofonte Campanini proved the most gentle and sympathetic of conductors, and became a very good friend.

One day, near the end of a rehearsal in the foyer, a stranger came in. Campanini rushed up to him and greeted him effusively. The newcomer was a short, stoutish man with piercing dark eyes and a Van Dyck beard; but John had eyes only for his silk hat. It was like the tall hats one sees on caricatures of French diplomats, high, with a tapering crown and an absolutely flat rim: a hat which could be picked out even in an Ascot crowd.

John was just wondering who on earth this could be, when Campanini turned and beckoned to him.

'Giovanni—meet Mr. Oscar Hammerstein.'

Hammerstein came to the point at once. He always came to the point at once.

'Would you like to sing for me at the Manhattan Opera House in New York?' he asked.

John tried to appear nonchalant, as if an engagement in New York were an everyday affair in his life.

'I would be delighted to sing for you, Mr. Hammerstein,' he replied.

'All right,' replied the impresario. 'I will give you a three year contract at seven hundred dollars a week for the first season, nine hundred for the second, and twelve hundred and fifty for the third. Three performances a week. We open in November. Mr. Campanini will arrange all the details about transportation and repertoire. Good-bye, and the best of luck.'

He turned away, leaving John staggered by this example of American business brevity. So staggered was he that he had no time to be staggered by his fee.

While he was still gasping, Hammerstein suddenly stopped, and looked at him with a knowing twinkle in his eye.

'McCormack, an Irishman, singing Italian opera in New York. Sounds like a cinch? We should get a brand new audience of opera-goers.'

They did.

Such was John's introduction to Oscar Hammerstein. Hammerstein was an extraordinary man, something of a

genius, and the greatest showman of his time. He was an inventor, and had a good working knowledge of music. Once he made a bet that he would write a comic opera, words and music, in twenty-four hours. He won the bet, although he afterwards said that the only comic thing about the opera was that it was written in twenty-four hours.

Hammerstein had a mania for the theatre, and his Victoria Vaudeville House was the high-spot in that profession. But vaudeville was not enough, and Hammerstein decided that he would build an opera house in New York.

When Hammerstein decided a thing, it was done. He chose his site, on West Thirty-fourth Street. He found his architect. He discussed the plans; and he built his opera house—one of the easiest to sing in in the world. He sent scouts to Europe to search for talent for his company, and then, not trusting them, he followed them himself.

With the unerring eye and ear of the true showman, he got his company together. He engaged Campanini as his conductor and general manager, and in both capacities the Italian was a tower of strength. Even before the opera house was finished, the company was formed—and what a company! Tetrazzini, Mary Garden, Bonci, Zenatello, Dalmore, Sammarco, Maurice Renaud, Gilibert, Bressler, Gianoli—these, and many others, came to America under the Hammerstein banner.

A little later Hammerstein decided to run an opera house in London. The building he chose is now the Stoll picture-house in Kingsway; but, despite all his energy and showmanship, and the formidable cast of singers he engaged, the London public regarded Covent Garden as the only home of opera, and gave him such poor support that the venture came to an end.

In the career of any successful artist, the events that make him are so dovetailed one into another that it is impossible to pick out one and point to it as decisive. If any single piece of good fortune in John's career could be picked out, it would be this engagement to sing in New York under Hammerstein. True, it came his way through Covent Garden, and Covent Garden came his way through Sir John Murray Scott, and Sir John Murray Scott came his way through the Boosey concerts, which in their turn came his way through Visetti, and so on, back to the very start. But the Hammerstein engagement introduced him to New York, and so to the whole American continent, where the basis of his fame and fortune was to lie.

'Opportunity did not knock on my door,' he says. 'It did not have to—Oscar Hammerstein opened the door and let it in.'

The instant the rehearsal was over, John rushed to the telephone to tell Lily the good news.

Lily was of course overjoyed, but her mother instinct at once came to the fore.

'Who will take care of the children?' she wanted to know.

'Never mind about that,' said John. 'If you stay at home to look after the children, who will look after me?'

It was a nice point, but, fortunately, someone was at hand to solve it. Lily's sister, known to all the McCormacks as Auntie, undertook the care of the children, so that Lily was free to go. The children still thank her after all these years, but John has a strong suspicion that she thoroughly spoiled them.

CHAPTER 8

NOW THE TIME had come to start for New York and fulfil the engagement with Oscar Hammerstein. Lily and John sailed on the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, on October the 15th. The passage was uneventful, but rather rough. John sang at the ship's concert, and was accompanied by a very charming and beautiful girl from Boston. Her name was Lilla Ormond, now Mrs. Ray Dennis, and she became and remained one of the McCormacks' dearest friends. She was an excellent musician, and sang very well herself. She and John still laugh over that concert, for the ship was rolling, and she was as unsteady on her piano stool as John was on his feet. Luckily they got through their songs without anything untoward happening.

This arrival in New York was a very different matter from John's arrival only five years ago. Then he was, in his own words, 'A lonesome, homesick, forgotten gossoon, not twenty years old.' Now he was coming to sing at the Manhattan Opera House. Lily and he were interviewed and photographed, and Hammerstein's special press agent, Billy Guard, was there to welcome and make much of them. The pair went first of all to the New York Hotel on Eighth Avenue, and then moved to the famous Hoffman House, where they were made to feel so much at home that they have never been as happy in any other hotel in the world.

The morning after their arrival, Billy Guard came to fetch John down to the opera house. Billy was a great

character. Born in Ireland, he had come to America as a young man, and at once became interested in newspaper work. Profiting by his experience, he turned press agent, a game at which he excelled. He was very tall and very thin, like a human string-bean. His head was curiously shaped. It rose in a high dome, and he accentuated the dome by parting his fine silky hair in the middle. His face was narrow and long, and his eyes smiled kindly. Billy was one of the most popular figures in all operatic New York. Everyone loved him: artists, actors, musical critics.

As they drove to the opera house, Billy gave John sound advice as to how to get on the good side of Hammerstein.

'He likes the Irish,' Billy said, 'but I have told him that you are one of the temperamental ones that might fight first and apologize afterwards.'

John did not know what to make of that. In any case, he need not have worried. He never had a cross word with Oscar Hammerstein during the whole time he sang for him.

II

The season was to open on November the 7th with *La Traviata*. It brought old friends together: John singing Alfredo to the Violetta of Tetrazzini, with Sammarco as the father.

One morning, as John came out of the opera house after a rehearsal, a tall, finely set-up young man came up to him.

'Are you not John McCormack?'

'I am.'

'Well, I am an Irishman from the Kingdom of Kerry; and I want to welcome you to New York and to tell you we are proud to have an Irishman singing in Italian opera



to my
Lily

LILY

in New York, and that we will be there on the opening night to wish you luck and cheer you on your way.'

It was a long speech from a stranger, and John was deeply touched. He grasped the Kerry man's hand and thanked him.

'But you haven't told me your name,' he said.

The young man's face broke into a smile which John was to know well in future years.

'Ah, sure, my name doesn't make any difference at all,' he said. 'But, if it interests you, my name is Denis McSweeney.'

It was an important meeting, for Denis McSweeney, that kindly, good-looking Kerry man, was to do more than anyone in helping John towards the greatest success he ever made. Although another man, Charles L. Wagner, actually introduced him to the American concert world, and made a splendid job of it, it was Denis McSweeney who built up John's concert career in America. For more than a quarter of a century he managed all John's concert affairs, and remained his friend and adviser till the day he died. The McCormack family owes him a debt which nothing can repay.

As November the 7th approached, John had a stroke of real bad luck, recalling that which befell him just before his first return to Athlone. He caught a feverish cold, and this, added to the nervous strain of such an important occasion, made him no fit company for man or beast.

The subject of nervousness interests him deeply, and he is always coming back to it.

'It is a strange thing,' he said to me—he had been apologizing for refusing to speak on the telephone on a day he was due to sing—'It's a strange thing that in my long career I have never been able to shake off that nervousness. Whether I was singing in Hohokus or New York, in London or Stow-on-the-Wold, that nervous feeling persisted

and made me silent and cranky. In fact, when the children were very young, they used to say, "Pop must be singing somewhere to-night, as he won't speak above a whisper, and he's awful bad tempered."

It can be imagined then in what a state of nerves he found himself on that November evening. Doctor Dupont, the Company's adviser, came most nobly to his rescue. He stood in the wings during the entire performance, looking after John every time he came off, and pulling him through as much by his encouragement as by his medicaments. In fact, John sang so well that some of the critics thought that the announcement he had a cold was a stunt to gain sympathy.

Tetrazzini and Sammarco, as ever, were marvellous colleagues, but John's greatest thrill of all came when, after the performance, Oscar Hammerstein came into his dressing-room. The great man came across and put an arm affectionately round his shoulder.

'Well done, Mike,' he said, 'you'll do.'

He never called John anything but Mike from that day.

III

That night John left an order with the porter to send all the papers up next morning. There was no doubt whatever about his success. Every single notice was good, but what specially encouraged John was the feeling that he was singing in a friendly atmosphere. To one of John's temperament, it meant a great deal to have behind him that feeling of goodwill, of anxiety that he should succeed, of constructive criticism. He felt it in New York throughout the whole of his career.

John has a great deal to say about musical criticism, and,

as always, he expresses himself forcibly. Honest statements of opinion never came amiss to him, provided always that they were spoken in the best interests of the music, the public, or the performer. What he abominates, and protests against to his last breath, is the sneering type of criticism which is inspired by malice or superiority, or desire to show how clever the critic is. The man who shows off at the expense of the work or the performer is contemptible everywhere, and John has plenty to say about him. For himself, he has never minded hard knocks, so long as they were fairly given. If told that he was bad in this or that, he would study to improve, and be grateful if he found that what was said was true. But the sort of criticism that began from a prejudice, that blamed him for not doing something he never set out to do, that showed ignorance of what he was doing, never cut any ice with him at all.

He has never been able to believe those artists who say they never read their press notices. He has always read his, and eagerly.

'My experience all over the world has been that musical critics on the whole are fair-minded, honest men who write what they think. I have disagreed with them completely many times, and I always will, but they have as good a right to their opinion as I have to mine.'

He burst out laughing.

'That puts me in mind of an evening with Rachmaninov. He is a very dear friend of ours, and one night, when he had come to dinner with us in New York, he asked me, before the other guests arrived, to put on some of the latest records I had made.

I put on "*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt*" by Tschaikowsky, with the 'cello obbligato by my friend, Lauri Kennedy—an excellent 'cellist, by the way. The song had not proceeded five bars before the deep Russian voice of Rachmaninov boomed out "It is too slow."

'I expostulated, but to no effect. Rachmaninov kept repeating "It is too slow."

'"I like it at my tempo," said I.

'"Perhaps you do. But it is not Tschaikowsky's tempo."

'This was rather shattering, and I suppose I looked put out, for Madame Rachmaninov intervened and spoke to her husband severely in Russian.

'Serge listened to her, accepting her rebuke. Then his very expressive face lit up in a smile.

'He turned to me and said, "John, my wife says you have a perfect right to your opinion—**BUT YOU ARE WRONG.**"

'We have laughed over that episode many a time. In fact, it is our pet story about each other.'

IV

Another joy to John during that first season in New York was the generous and consistent support of his own race. No question of politics or religion ever arose to darken that relationship. John felt that the people of Irish blood were supporting and aiding him, and were perhaps a little proud of him, because they knew in their hearts that he was trying his best to be a credit to his country, and was determined to show that the stage Irishman of Boucicault, the red whiskers and the caubeen and the clay pipe, were a caricature and an insult to all Irishmen. It has been his lifelong endeavour to show that Irish folk-music is the most beautiful in all the world, and that in Ireland there is such a thing as musical culture and musical appreciation.

The first Irishman to go behind the scenes at the Manhattan Opera House and greet him was Judge McAdoo. This celebrated man was born in the north of Ireland, and

was a Protestant. He came to America as a young man, and became a splendid figure in the political and judicial life of New York city. To John he set a standard of what a politician or a judge should be. His enthusiasm for John's work, and his friendly advice at all times, were of inestimable value during that formative first season. There were plenty of others too, including John's beloved Victor Herbert; but his place comes later in the story.

The fervour of John's Irish supporters is attested in a story told by Arthur Hammerstein, Oscar's son. He was being shaved one day by an Italian barber who was extolling Caruso.

'What do you think of McCormack?' asked Hammerstein.

'He's a fine singer,' replied the barber, 'but he's not in Caruso's class.'

On this a man who was waiting to be shaved leaped to his feet and declared in broad Dublin that the barber did not know what he was talking about. He offered to fight the whole shopful, and looked as if he could.

Hammerstein, to soothe him, suggested mildly that the two tenors were of different kinds, John being a lyric and Caruso a dramatic tenor. This did not appease the Irishman. He roared louder than ever.

'I don't give a damn,' said he, 'what kind of a tenor Johnny McCormack is. I only know he can sing like hell.'

On this Hammerstein withdrew, and left them to fight it out.

In the course of the season, John sang in practically all the operas in which Tetrazzini appeared. The one that

gave him the greatest pleasure and the greatest personal success was Donizetti's *The Daughter of the Regiment*. Tetrazzini was, of course, the heroine, and Gilibert played the sergeant, in which rôle he gave a superb performance.

In the Italian version there is no aria for the tenor, but Donizetti wrote one specially for the French edition, and, by great luck, Gilibert had a copy of the French score. Rehearsals were half-way through, and the first performance already announced, when Gilibert proposed that John should sing the aria. The immediate difficulty was that it was in French. Nothing daunted, John took down the French words, and began to translate them into Italian.

'I do not think the Italian was Dantesque,' he said, 'but at least it made sense, which is more than the words of many arias do.'

Under the title '*Per viver vicino a Maria*', John sang the aria, and with it had by far his greatest success in opera. It was peculiarly suited to his voice, and the record made of it that same season still brings him back the thrill of that first performance of *The Daughter of the Regiment*.

VI

New York enjoyed a wonderful feast of opera in those days when the Manhattan flourished. Between the Manhattan and the Metropolitan Company existed a strong and healthy rivalry. Naturally, in the matter of their conductor and their principal tenor the Metropolitan won hands down. Toscanini and Caruso were in a class by themselves. But with the rest of the company the Manhattan could hold their own. To match the Metropolitan's Geraldine Farrar, they had Mary Garden. To match Emmy Destinn, they had Mazarin—unforgettable in Electra, even though

it was sung in French. For the Metropolitan's Antonio Scotti, the Manhattan had Maurice Renaud, a really great actor with a genius for costume and make-up; and they were able to follow up with Zenatello, one of the finest of Italian lyric tenors, whose only fault was a desire for a bigger voice than God had given him; with Sammarco, Gilibert, the lovely Lina Cavalieri, little Emma Trentini, a wonderful Musetta in *La Bohème*, and the Irish tenor thrown in for good weight.

One day at rehearsal Oscar Hammerstein came in in a state of high glee. He had just had an advance tip that the Metropolitan were going to put on *La Bohème*, with Caruso, Farrar, and Scotti.

He came up to John.

'Mike, I'm going to do *Bohème* the same night, with Lina Cavalieri, Sammarco, and you. They may win the singing contest at the Metropolitan, but we shall get the good looks stakes.'

John had always thought Geraldine Farrar one of the loveliest women he ever saw; but he did not say a word to Hammerstein.

New York took a great interest in the performance, and, leaving Caruso out of it, John reckons the Manhattan about held their own.

Hammerstein's only comment was, 'Well, Mike, we rang down eight minutes before they did.' But whether he meant this for praise or blame, John could not make out.

However, he had something else to remember the performance by, and that was Lina Cavalieri. She was a dazzling creature, picked by international vote as the loveliest Italian woman of her time. Her voice was nothing wonderful—it would have been asking Nature too much that one woman should combine such beauty with a first-class voice; but she sang quite well. The only difficulty she gave her colleagues was that she loved to act with a capital A.

'I tried in my quiet way to keep up with her in the first three acts,' says John, 'but in the last—well, she didn't act me off the stage, but she pretty nearly acted me off the bed on which she lay dying, and she literally acted my wig off in the ecstasy of her love. I didn't tear my hair in paroxysms of grief at her death. She tore it for me. In fact, I had to buy a new wig for my next performance—and damned expensive it was too.'

Two other colleagues during this season found John's acting powers fall short. He was singing *Cavalleria Rusticana* with Carmen Melis, a Chilean, another lovely creature with a very fair voice. The lady protested that John was too reserved and quiet as her Sicilian lover. Turiddu should be fiery and passionate.

In one scene, Turiddu is supposed to cast Santuzza from him in a fit of anger. It is unusual in Ireland for gentlemen to throw their lady friends about, and John was a little on the diffident side.

'Do not be afraid!' Carmen Melis scolded him. 'Use your strength when you throw me across the stage. I can take care of myself.'

When, next evening, the great scene came, John took her at her word, and hurled his Santuzza from him with such vigour that she went for six, landing in the wings on the far side of the stage. John was terrified, because she had to come back and sing the big duet with Alfio. She came on, limping badly. The audience applauded, thinking this a piece of business. At the end of the duet John rushed up to her and apologized most profusely. The lady smiled and took it in a most charming fashion, but told John that she was black and blue from the fall. She even wished to give a demonstration, but Lily intervened, assuring her that they were perfectly ready to take her word.

The third Santuzza, Mazarin, produced the most devastating criticism of all.

'Monsieur McCormack,' she said suavely, after the first rehearsal, 'if Turiddu was like you, I should never have had to complain to his mother about my unfortunate predicament.'

VII

The season went on well, and John kept adding to his repertoire. Besides *Bohème* and *The Daughter of the Regiment*, he sang *Lakmé*, *Tosca*, and other operas in Tetrazzini's repertoire. His success grew, and he was presently invited to sing at the new opera house which Hammerstein had built in Philadelphia. This was a beautiful house, wonderful in its acoustics: John was destined to have some of his greatest concert successes there in years to come.

To one of his first performances at Philadelphia came the head of the Artists' Department of the Victor Talking Machine Company. He was delighted with John's work, and, like the canny New Englander that he was, he saw great possibilities in the sale of records of real Irish songs sung by a real Irish tenor among Irish-American people. He arranged for John to make a test record of one operatic aria and one Irish song.

John went to Camden, New Jersey, and there recorded the aria from the last act of *Lucia de Lammermoor*, 'Tu che a Dio spiegasti l'ali,' and 'Killarney.' Both were excellent, particularly the former. They were John's first records to be released in America, and are still in the catalogue after more than a quarter of a century.

On the strength of these, John was offered a contract. Unfortunately, he had still two more years to sing for the Odeon Company in London. The Victor Company cabled to London and asked the Odeon Company how much they

would accept to release him. They asked two thousand pounds. Then the Victor Company cabled the Gramophone Company in London, asking them to pay half of this sum. They had a working agreement with the English company about all their artists.

The Gramophone Company thought the Victor Company had gone crazy. What—pay two thousand pounds for the release of John McCormack, whom they, only three years before, had refused to engage at any price! Who, only six years before, had been glad to make ten records for fifty pounds! It was preposterous. The Americans must be crazy.

Crazy or not, the Victor Company paid the whole two thousand pounds, and on February the 10th, 1910, they gave John a contract which did not lapse till February 1938. He was to receive ten thousand dollars in advance of royalties, and ten per cent of the listed price of each record.

'There has been so much poppycock written about my Victor contract and my fabulous earnings from the sale of records,' John says, 'that I am setting down the terms of that contract here. Don't think I'm complaining! On the contrary, I am proud of that contract. I'm grateful to the Victor Company for helping so much in the building of my personal following—not to mention the welcome cheques which helped me to buy a Rolls-Royce and a Franz Hals portrait, as well as a couple of not-so-good racehorses. But on ten per cent of the listed price of the records, you can easily see that the monumental earnings which the press credited to me were just impossible. I touched my peak at close on three hundred thousand dollars one year, and that beat Caruso. Enrico, when he heard of it, said with a laugh, "Congratulations, Mac. But don't let it happen again."

'Amongst the ten records I made that year was one that,

as I said before, far outsold any record I ever made—"I Hear You Calling Me."

'I have left till the end, on purpose, the name of my very dear old friend who signed that contract on behalf of the Victor Company. I want here to thank him not only for the contract, but for the great gift of his friendship. Bless you, Calvin G. Child!'

VIII

During that winter season the company visited Washington, where they were honoured by the presence of President Taft at a performance. Then they went to Boston, where began John's great friendship with Caruso. It was here that Caruso gave John his first photograph, with the pleasing if quaint inscription, 'To McCormack, very friendly, Enrico Caruso.'

This old and rather faded photograph is one of John's most treasured possessions. He had a special reason for valuing it. When he had gone as a student to Milan, he had bought a photo of Caruso as Des Grieux in *Manon*, and signed it himself 'To John McCormack, from Enrico Caruso.' Now he had the reality. That the 'very friendly' was no mere form, but came from the heart, John had many proofs in the years to come.

The tour went on with the usual ups and downs. In Cincinnati, where they arrived in the middle of March, the weather was bitter, and Tetrazzini developed such a cold that her voice sank to a whisper. When the company arrived, they found the house almost sold out; but as soon as the management announced that Tetrazzini could not sing, the people went straight to the box office and got their

money back. The company gave their performance nevertheless, but to the smallest audience they had ever seen.

Throughout the whole of the season, there were concerts every Sunday, and at one of these John made his first concert appearance in New York. He chose as his two items the aria from *Lucia*, and the old Irish melody with which he had won his gold medal in 1903, 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl.'

After the performance Oscar Hammerstein prophesied that concert singing, not opera, would be John's forte in America. Calvin Child and the Victor Company thought the same. They were good prophets.

The season was finishing, the days were busy, and John's difficulty, if anything, was to avoid hospitality. Everywhere were people anxious to fête him and make much of him. One evening, when they were singing in Washington, a card was brought in to John, announcing Major Butt. Major Butt walked in, greeted him, and told him that President Taft wanted him to lunch at the White House next day.

John could not believe his ears. 'There must be some mistake,' he said.

'Well,' said Butt, 'the President told me to invite the young Irish tenor, John McCormack, to lunch; and you're John McCormack, aren't you?'

John was still incredulous. Next day he and Lily walked round the White House for half an hour before he plucked up courage to approach the door. But the President made them very welcome, showing them the greatest kindness, and next day gave John the added honour of presenting his colleagues to him.

Major Butt was the President's military *aide*. He and John became very close friends. One day Butt commented on their friendship.

'Something tells me,' he said, 'that it will last our lives.'

It was the last time John saw him, for shortly afterwards he went down with the *Titanic*.

The season ended gloriously, and John was ‘on the pig’s back’—on top of the world. He had made a great success, he had received kindness and friendliness everywhere, he had a ten thousand dollar cheque in his pocket, and a long contract with the leading record company.

‘I suppose I was throwing my weight about,’ he says, ‘but I was brought to earth when my darling wife said, “Well, John, we sail to-morrow for London, and then you go back to your place.” I felt like a child must feel who has been showing off before the neighbour’s children, when his mother admonishes him in front of them.’

He walked across the studio to get a drink.

‘One difference I have always noticed between English audiences and American ones. In England, once they take you to their hearts and make you a favourite, you remain a favourite for all time, even when the voice is only a dim shadow. The American public is more demonstrative, but it is fickle. In the one country: once a favourite, always a favourite. In the other: to-day a celebrity, to-morrow an extra.’

An amusing memento of the Hammerstein season is the following set of verses, by Arthur G. Burgoyne, which appeared in the *Pittsburgh Chronicle*:

There’s a youthful Irish tenor
In the train of Hammerstein
He can chant Italian ditties
In a manner that’s divine.
But they say that though his training
Has Italianized him quite
Thoughts of dear old verdant Ireland
Permeate his dreams at night.
And he finds himself a-singing
In a voice that’s soft and low

Of 'Hibernia O Cara,'
Where the 'pom' di terra's grow.

Mem'ry takes him back to places
Which in youthful days he knew.
To Kilkenny dei Gatti,
Gatti which each other slew,
To the Sala della Tara
For arpeggios renowned,
To the Laghi di Killarney,
Which in beauties rare abound,
And with fondest recollection
He goes back—in dreams, you know—
And on Blarney's old pietra
Plants a warm Il Bacio.

He recalls the broad riviera,
Called the Shannon on the map,
And the little thatched taverne
With liquori strong on tap,
And the sturdy contadini,
Living always as of yore,
With porcelli in the parlor
And pollastri at the door.
And the cheeks color di rose
Of the nero-haired colleen
In carissima Hibernia,
Where the erba grows so green.

Thus his heart remains still loyal
And wherever he may stray
San Patrizio watches o'er him
In a most especial way.
And though using foreign lingo,
Yet the fact he won't disguise,
That his name it is McCormack,
Which you can't Italianize.
And perhaps some day he'll venture
Giving up his foreign ways,
And do *Lohengrin* in Irish
And set all the world ablaze.

After an uneventful trip, John and Lily arrived back in London for the 1910 Grand Season at Covent Garden. As it happens, all John's long sea voyages—they include more than a hundred crossings of the Atlantic—have been uneventful.

For both parents, the great excitement of coming home was to see the children. Then John was once more in the routine at Covent Garden, rehearsing old operas and studying new ones.

One morning he was called to the office. Neil Forsythe, the manager, was in great excitement.

'John,' he exclaimed, 'I have a great surprise for you.'

John's mind naturally ran to the thought of a rise in salary, but the surprise was nothing so banal, nothing so mercenary. He was told, as if he were receiving a state secret, that he was to have the great privilege of singing *La Bohème* with Madame Melba, at her own request.

John was duly impressed, and deeply grateful for the compliment, but he could not get over a sense of disappointment. A call into the *sanctum sanctorum* of the general manager, awed tones and bated breath, and then the news that he was to sing with Melba—it was something of an anticlimax. Still, Melba was Melba, and the undisputed queen of the Royal Opera.

La Bohème has always been one of John's favourite operas, both to sing and to hear. It was in *Bohème* that he first heard Caruso in 1904, and came under the spell of that incomparable voice. The part of Rodolfo always suited him, and was lucky for him. On the day after his farewell concert at the Albert Hall in 1938, he sat down at his piano and went through the whole opera from the first bar to the last.

Now he was to sing it at Covent Garden, and with Melba.

There has seldom been an artist about whom opinion was so sharply divided as about Melba, both as singer and colleague. Her host of hero-worshippers insisted that she was a combination of Malibran and Patti, with a heart of gold towards her colleagues. The others insisted that she possessed a voice of lovely quality, was a perfect mistress of vocal technique, was childish as an actress, and—to put it mildly—unkind to her colleagues.

John had every opportunity of getting to know Melba, and his verdict on her is based on sound experience. He sang five seasons with her at Covent Garden, and toured with her as her principal tenor. He speaks of her as he found her; and his summing-up is that she was neither as great as her worshippers made her, nor nearly as bad as her detractors would like to make her.

Before singing with Melba at Covent Garden, John went with her on a short tour. They were joined by the pianist, Wilhelm Backhaus, at that time a young man with a mop of golden hair—like Leopold Stokowski, only more so.

Melba was very much in command. Orders went forth at the beginning of the tour that no one was to take an encore until she had sung one. This struck John as very odd. He thought she should be delighted if the small fry were successful, because that would mean that the appetite of the audience was being gently whetted, and they would the better appreciate the queenly fare about to be placed before them. However, that was the standing order for the tour, and it had to be respected.

Now for John's account of Melba in his own words. First, as a singer.

'Melba's vocal equipment was splendid. The tone was beautiful, and beautifully placed. Her technique was perfection. Her trill was exquisite, her scales were pearl-like,

her *picchettati* were like a bird's notes. Her diction in English was Australian, just as it was in French and Italian. (I never heard her sing in German.) Her phrasing was, as a rule, uninspired, and sometimes it sounded slipshod, yet she sang certain phrases in a way no other singer I ever heard could even approach. In *Romeo et Juliette* she so carried me away by the sheer exquisite beauty of the sound in the beginning of the second act that, one night in Melbourne, I forgot to sing my answering phrase as Romeo. And who that ever heard Melba in *Bohème* will forget the finale in the third act, especially that phrase beginning "*Vorrei che eterno durasse l'inverno?*" To me it was the perfection of the vocal art.

'Her acting? She was just as good or bad as I was. As the Dublin jarveys used to say, "I leave it to yourselves."

'As a colleague, she was a mass of contradictions. I have known her do some of the kindest things, and some of the most cruel. In the matter of sharing applause, I can frankly say she was by far the most selfish singer I ever sang with. Applause was meat and drink to her. In Paris, at a charity matinée of *La Bohème*, she had me go to my colleagues and ask them to let her have a curtain alone at the end of the third act, of all places!

'Perhaps I can best express my feelings about Melba as a colleague by saying that in the seventeen years I knew Enrico Caruso, I never heard him say an unkind word of a fellow-artist. Melba was different.

'Nevertheless, when she sang, she made one forget the colleague, and listen to the singer. I can pay her no greater compliment.'

x

John sang *La Bohème* oftener than any other opera. During his comparatively short operatic career he sang

with eighteen different Mimos. Some he has quite forgotten. Five stand out. As a singer, Melba took the palm, though she neither looked nor acted the part. Dramatically, Geraldine Farrar was superb. Pictorially, Lina Cavalieri stood by herself. But, all in all, John's ideal Mimos were Lucrezia Bori and Claudia Muzio. Both were splendid artists, both sang the part beautifully, both acted it with great simplicity and pathos, and both were lovely to look at.

John's ideal cast for *La Bohème* is as follows:

<i>Rodolfo</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Enrico Caruso
<i>Mimi</i>	:	:	:	:	:	Lucrezia Bori or Claudia Muzio
<i>Musetta</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Emma Trentini <i>(at the beginning of her career)</i>
<i>Colline</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Vanni Marcoux
<i>Schaunard</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Charles Gilibert
<i>Marcello</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Mario Sammarco
<i>Benoit</i>	}	.	.	.	.	Francesco Daddi
<i>Parpignol</i>		.	.	.	.
	<i>Conductor</i> —Cleofonte Campanini.					

xi

John's first performance with Melba was a great occasion for him. It marked an epoch in his career at Covent Garden. Melba's endorsement of his singing set a seal on his work, and broke down the last bit of snobbishness remaining among those who believed that nothing good could come out of Ireland. For that, John was, and still is, grateful to her.

During that season Puccini paid a visit to London, and came to the opera one night to hear *La Bohème*. John met him on the stage after the performance. He came to the

meeting eagerly, because of his love of the opera and his great respect for the man who had written it.

Puccini, on the other hand, showed no enthusiasm. He asked John with whom he had studied the part. John replied that he had learned it note for note from the score. Puccini raised his eyebrows, and told him there were certain spots (*Certi punti*) on which he should consult some authority.

John did not relish this at all. He thought he had given an excellent performance, and he always liked his own singing of Rodolfo, as, apparently, did the public and the critics both in New York and London.

He therefore said, with a bow, that he could not ask any greater authority than the Maestro himself. Would the Maestro be so kind as to tell him what the spots were?

Puccini did not seem to care for this.

'Oh!' he replied. 'It does not matter. Good night, and bravo.'

And he went away, leaving John wondering whether he had made a bad impression.

Within a couple of weeks he had no doubt. One Sunday evening, Puccini was the guest of honour at Lady de Grey's. John was invited, and after dinner sang the duet from the first act of *Tosca* with Madame Edvina, a charming and beautiful singer. After they had finished, Puccini came up and thanked Edvina effusively. John waited for a crumb of praise, but not one word did he get.

'Now,' he says, 'I couldn't have sung as badly as that. In fact, I know very well I did not! Perhaps Puccini did not like Irishmen! His attitude however made no difference to my intense admiration of certain of his operas such as *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madame Butterfly*. Nor would his most fulsome flattery have made me like such horrors as *Il Tabarro* or *Turandot*.'¹

¹ We do not see eye to eye here.

About the middle of the season, alarming reports began to come from New York that Oscar Hammerstein was going to give up the Manhattan Opera House and sell out to the Metropolitan Opera Company. John, disturbed by this, asked Campanini. The conductor had heard rumours too, and one morning they were confirmed. The Manhattan Opera House was sold bag and baggage to the Metropolitan Opera Company, just like a baseball team. They were to sing eight weeks in Chicago and eight weeks in Philadelphia, with special guest performances by the whole company at the Metropolitan on Tuesday nights. John agreed to the new proposal, and it was lucky for him that he did, for from that new arrangement his long concert career in America began.

It was, in his view, a great tragedy for American music that Hammerstein could not carry on at the Manhattan. For one thing, the performances at the Metropolitan, during the time it had to compete against the Manhattan, reached heights they had never reached before. Gatti-Casazza was brought over from the Scala in Milan to manage the Metropolitan, and the wonderful success he made of it is a matter of history. Toscanini was brought to take charge of the music, and to give such performances as New York never heard before or since.

John had heard Toscanini conduct many times at the Scala, but says that at the Metropolitan he performed miracles.

Miracles were necessary. At the Scala, there had always been a keen sense of discipline throughout the whole organization. The chorus, the orchestra, the principals, felt it an honour to be engaged there, and were inspired by the special atmosphere of that historic house, so that Toscanini

found a white-hot mass afire with enthusiasm, which he could weld as he wished, and model as his genius bade him.

At the Metropolitan things were different. The star system prevailed, and the slogan of the star system is a paraphrase of '*L'état c'est moi*'—'*L'opera, son io!*' Under Toscanini all that fell away. The music was all that mattered—and, miraculously, the stars responded to his magic beat.

'I never heard Caruso sing as well as he sang under Toscanini. Nor Farrar. Nor Destinn. As for the chorus and orchestra, they were like the Irishman who shaved off his beard after two years, and said to his friends, "Do you know, I had a devil of a time recognizing myself?" I know that I thought there was a new chorus and orchestra at the Metropolitan on the first night of *Boris Godounoff*, when Adamo Didur sang the name part, under Toscanini. I did not recognize them!'

XIII

But to return to Covent Garden. The Company again performed *Don Giovanni*, this season with another Don, John Forel of the Stockholm opera. He was an excellent singer and actor, and John reckons him one of the most satisfactory Dons he ever heard. Destinn was an unforgettable Donna Anna.

'Her singing of the recitative before the aria "*Or sai che l'onore*" was dramatic perfection, and her singing of the aria in the last act, "*Non mi dir*," remains one of my treasured memories of the vocal art at its highest.'

Then, one night towards the end of the season, John got a real surprise. During the second act of *La Bohème*, during which Rodolfo and Mimi have quite a little time for

conversation, Melba said to him, 'McCormack, how would you like to come to Australia with me?'

For a moment John did not realize what she meant. He grinned.

'This is so sudden!' he said.

Melba's eyes glinted.

'Don't be a damn fool,' she snapped. 'I am serious. I am taking an opera company to Australia next year, and I want you to be the principal tenor.'

John was delighted, and told her so. At once they began to talk over the repertoire—and were suddenly brought back to *La Bohème* by the agitated voice of the Maestro Suggeritore—the prompter, Maestro Pla—and the nudges of their colleagues on the stage.

There were many details to arrange before the contract for Australia could be signed. John had to get permission to cut short his season at Covent Garden, and to cut his American season in half. However, Melba wangled the one and he wangled the other, and finally he signed his contract for opera in Australia: ten weeks in Sydney and ten in Melbourne, three performances a week, at fifty pounds a performance. As it turned out, they did twelve weeks in Sydney and eight in Melbourne; but that is another story.

So there was John, at the end of the Grand Season of 1910, with all his plans reshuffled and all his labels changed. He was no longer a member of the Manhattan Opera Company, but of the Chicago-Philadelphia Opera Company. He was to sing half the Grand Season in 1911, and spend the other half on the ocean. Such reshufflings and such upsets have followed him throughout his career. Even in his home affairs, Lily and he have often laughed to see how seldom anything arranged long ahead turns out as planned.

During this Grand Season of 1910, England was saddened by the death of the beloved Edward VII. The funeral was something John has never forgotten.

'I had never seen anything like it. I had always visualized it as a Coronation procession in reverse, so to speak, but it was infinitely more. It was truly "a purple pageant of unspeakable woe," for Edward VII was a well-loved father of his people, and his children mourned him.'

CHAPTER 9

OCTOBER 1910 FOUND the McCormacks in Chicago for the opening of the season by the Chicago-Philadelphia Company. The entire adventure was underwritten by Mr. and Mrs. Harold McCormick. Mrs. McCormick was the daughter of the oil king, John D. Rockefeller, and Harold had his fortune from McCormick's farming fixtures.

The two had a sumptuous house by Lake Michigan, a large spread-eagle house of the Chicago millionairesque period inside and out. They entertained a great deal.

'Guests were always "bidden" rather than invited; the table of course "groaned" with good things; the floral decorations always had a "motive" and consisted of out-of-season flowers; the china was Sèvres, and the goblets were of gold. But, alas and alack, the Rockefellers never allowed anything into those goblets stronger than water. Can you imagine anything more incongruous and insipid than cold water in golden goblets?'

The general manager of the new company was Andreas Dippel. Dippel used to be known at the Metropolitan as the old stand-by tenor, because he knew practically every opera in the repertoire, sang in every language, and could be counted upon to step into any rôle at a moment's notice. It would be too much to expect that he should have a beautiful voice as well. He had not.

The musical director was John's old friend, Cleofonte Campanini. The Irish are superstitious, but Campanini outran everyone John had ever known. John asked him one

day how it happened that he did not go to New York for the last Hammerstein season.

'Giovanni,' the conductor replied, 'I do not know what the real reason was, but I knew that I would not return.'

'But, Maestro, how could you be so sure?'

'Giovanni, I never begin anything on the thirteenth or on a Friday. When the ship arrived for my last season at the Manhattan, I noticed in my diary that it was the thirteenth. I asked the captain to let me stay on board until the next day. He kindly consented, and I remained; but, next morning, I had a message from the captain that I must leave the ship. I went to my hotel, and, *Dio mio!* it was Friday! I knew then I would never conduct for Hammerstein again.'

John burst out laughing. He could not have been serious at that moment if it had cost him his job. For about five minutes Campanini was very angry indeed. When he was angry, he had a marvellous fund of Italian expletives, and John got them all. Then he laughed too, and said he would take very great care that nothing of the kind ever happened again.

As a conductor, Campanini was first and foremost a disciplinarian. He was not by any means a great musician; in fact, it was doubted whether he could really read an orchestral score. He conducted all the well-known Italian operas from the piano score. The assistant conductor, Marcel Charlier, and Arthur Rosenstein, the very skilful accompanist, were of the greatest value to Campanini, especially in the study of such works as *Pelléas* and *Louise*.

Once he had become letter-perfect in a score, however, Campanini retained it always. His flair for phrasing and for dramatic effect did the rest. A splendid presence and an excellent baton technique completed his equipment. Not even his greatest admirers would have mentioned him in the same breath as Toscanini or Nikisch or Weingartner or

Karl Muck; but he was a fine conductor, considerate to his singers and easy to work with.

II

'We weighed anchor,' John says, 'with the usual uninteresting rehearsals. We gave a couple of toots on the ship's horn in the shape of an orchestral rehearsal. The bell rang out from the bridge "Full speed ahead," otherwise the call-boy's "Overture, ladies and gentlemen"—in several languages—and our ship was under way.'

From John's own point of view the Chicago season was just a routine one, containing the usual operas of the repertoire. From the musical point of view, there was one highlight. For more than a year much ballyhoo had been set going about the new Puccini opera, which had an American libretto and an American scene. The libretto of *Madame Butterfly* had been taken from a play by an American author, Luther Long, but the scene was laid in Japan. This time the scene was laid in sunny California, and the name of the opera was *The Girl of the Golden West*, or, in Italian, *La Fanciulla del Ovest*. In this version of the title the word 'golden' was omitted. John suggests that Puccini kept the gold for himself.

The world première took place in New York under Toscanini, with Caruso, Emmy Destinn, and Pasquale Amato. The production was by David Belasco, who wrote the original play. The singing, of course, was glorious, flood upon flood of golden tone, but not even the genius of a Belasco could make Caruso into a cowboy, nor Destinn into the female equivalent. To put it charitably, she did not look the part. Amato, an exceptionally good-looking singer,

was superb, and acted the rôle of Rance, the sheriff, as well as he sang it; and, needless to say, Toscanini showed Puccini how his music should be played and how it should be sung.

III

While all this was going on at the Metropolitan, John's company were making preparations for a performance of the same opera in Chicago. The cast included Carolina White as Minnie, Amadeo Bassi as Johnson, and Maurice Renaud as the sheriff.

Carolina White gave one of the very finest performances John ever heard on any operatic stage. She had everything in her favour for this rôle. She was a lovely creature, with a beautiful figure, and looked a regular out-of-door American girl. She had studied in Italy, and her voice was a lyric soprano of excellent quality. The part of Minnie is very difficult, but Carolina White was helped by the tremendous facility of her upper register.

'I am always telling you,' said John, 'of the thrill this and that performance gave me, but never mind. I shall never forget the thrill of Carolina's singing of that diabolical phrase in the first act in which she is telling Johnson how happy her childhood was, and how much in love with each other her father and mother had been. The phrase begins "*S'amavan tanto.*" I recommend it to some of my dramatic friends.'

The Johnson in the Chicago performance of *The Girl of the Golden West* was an old friend of John's. He had sung Canio in *Pagliacci* on the night that John made his début in *Cavalleria* at Covent Garden. John had got it into

his head at that time that Bassi did not like him, for of all the artists that appeared with him on that fateful October the 15th, Bassi was the only one who did not come to his dressing-room to wish him well. The traditional wish among Italians is '*Per dirti in bocca al lupo*', which wishes you literally 'into the mouth of the wolf.' Germans, on the other hand, hope you will break your leg and your back.

'I wonder what their origin was,' says John. 'I wonder if jealous singers meant them literally in the long ago when they were supposed to hate each other. That's a horrible thought! Anyway, I can show by actual example over and over again that there is no profession where there is such real generosity and appreciation of a colleague's efforts as there is among singers.'

Bassi had an extraordinary voice. It was beautiful in quality when he gave it a chance, but he had forced it from a light lyric tenor to a '*quasi drammatico*', like many a lyric tenor before him, and as a natural result he had developed a wobble. This was so strong that it was difficult for the listener to tell whether he was singing one note or the next. 'It was impossible,' as a distinguished critic wrote once of a tenor singing *Tristan*, 'to get his wave-length.'

To this Bassi added the distressing foible of scooping up to his high notes in such a way that the audience wondered for some time if he was ever going to get them. In spite of all this, he had the knack of gaining an audience's sympathies, and his singing, with all its oddities, could be quite moving. He was a good routine Italian tenor actor, with a power of far transcending these limitations every now and again; and in the last act of *The Girl of the Golden West* he sang Johnson's aria with great effect, gripping both the audience and his fellow-players.

Renaud played the sheriff.

'This I have always thought the most stupid piece of miscasting I ever saw,' John comments, 'until I saw a very

good-looking motion-picture star, all he-man and all-American in voice and personality, trying to play Parnell—and, believe it or not, trying to play him with sideburns instead of Parnell's flowing beard.'

At all events, Renaud, a Frenchman from the crown of his handsome head to the soles of his feet, was a pathetic figure trying to sing the part of a wild-west American sheriff in Italian. As an actor and a master of stage make-up, John placed him with Chaliapin and Vanni Marcoux. As Athanael in *Thaïs*, Renaud was amazing. His ravaged appearance at the end, with his great eyes blazing in a tortured face, will never be forgotten by anyone who saw him. He was wonderful too in *Tales of Hoffmann* and in *Rigoletto*.

Apart from the lovely performance of Carolina White, John's most vivid memory of this production was the singing of the Belgian baritone, Armand Crabbé, in the very small part of the camp minstrel. Crabbé was one of the tragedies of opera. He had a glorious baritone voice, equal in all its registers, with a range of more than two octaves; but he was a man of tiny stature, standing only five feet in his shoes.

As the season proceeded, Andreas Dippel conceived the idea of sending five or six singers into some of the larger nearby cities to give concerts. These concerts, as may be imagined, were not very interesting from a musical point of view. Two dramatic sopranos, a mezzo-soprano, and two tenors, accomplished singers though they might have been individually, did not conduce to a programme of great variety. Carolina White was one soprano, and Madame Wayda, who was to go to Australia with John as a dramatic soprano, was the other. The mezzo-soprano was Madame Olitzka, a singer of European reputation, and John's fellow-tenor was Nicola Zerola, a dramatic tenor with a powerful voice, noted for his performance as *Otello*,

which he was to give later at Covent Garden. The accompanist was Spencer Clay.

Zerola had one foible which caused the unhappy Campanini a good deal of trouble. If the action of the opera were interrupted by applause that lasted more than a few seconds, he was unable to carry on the note. In one or two places, particularly in *Aida*, Zerola always had to resume after such an interruption. He would sing his phrase anywhere, but always too high. The only way to meet the difficulty was to make an unofficial addition to the score, the strings giving the errant tenor his note so as to bring him in where he belonged.

John's keenest recollection of these concerts is the lambasting he took from one of the critics in Minneapolis. This gentleman for some reason took a violent dislike to John. A few years later he committed suicide when suffering from persecution mania.

IV

It is a sad fact about executive musicians that, once they are established, their story tends to lose humanity. Just as the pianist in Arnold Bennett's *Sacred and Profane Love* complains that his life is a series of station platforms and hotel bedrooms, so the human story becomes submerged in a mere series of seasons, tours, and recitals.

John is far too much alive, and his story far too lively, to be allowed this fate. From this point on, therefore, I shall be less concerned to follow the story from year to year than to pick out its high-lights and follow the man whom they illumine.

The season at Chicago was successful for John both personally and artistically. His friendship with Campanini grew steadily, and the two were often together. Discipli-

narian though the conductor was at work, he was on the easiest of terms with John.

One night a friend of his and John's was playing the king in *Aïda*, a part for which his talents were not suited. Campanini was terribly sorry to have missed this.

'Giovanni,' he said, his face a mask of real woe, 'isn't it hellish? Every time something really funny happens in the theatre, I am never there to see it.'

The Chicago season ended, the company packed their traps and left for Philadelphia. As Chicago had been promised a new opera by Puccini, Philadelphia was promised one by Victor Herbert. This was Victor Herbert's first attempt in the larger field. The name of the opera was *Natoma*, and the libretto, which had an Indian theme, was written by a life-long friend of Herbert's, by name Joseph Redding. The inimitable Mary Garden was to sing the name part, and the tenor part was entrusted to John. Also entrusted to John was the far more arduous task of teaching the English pronunciation to Sammarco, Dufranne, Huberdeau, and Armand Crabbé.

This task took up a great deal of his time. John's sense of humour, if it delayed the proceedings, at least made them go smoothly. Progress was slow, since every time John laughed at some transmogrification of a word—usually by adding an aspirate or withdrawing it—his pupils clamoured to know what the joke was, and he had to stop and explain. At the rehearsal after the lesson, Huberdeau was the most persistent offender. John concluded he was doing it on purpose just to see the effect, but he preserved a poker face throughout.

Of the four, Sammarco had the greatest difficulty, perhaps because his text was so unkind. One morning he came rushing to John, completely stumped.

'Giovanni! Giovanni! Nobody can sing this phrase. Not even with your diction you can make understood!'

John looked at the score, and saw that the unhappy baritone had been asked to sing, ‘We beg the privilege of a hunt upon the range of your hills.’

After hours of hard work, Sammarco succeeded in singing the phrase as ‘Wee bag the preeveeledge off a oont upon the raaange off your heels.’

In despair, John sang it back to him in his own accent. Sammarco collapsed on a chair and laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. Thereafter, every time they met, the two would try to see who could get this immortal phrase out first.

‘The music of *Natoma*,’ John says, ‘was just so and so. Victor Herbert was a great master of operetta, and I always feel that *Natoma* was an overgrown operetta, one that had grown bigger and noisier and more bombastic. The name part, exquisitely played by Mary Garden, had some beautiful phrases with the American Indian flavour, though, in my opinion, not so original as Charles Wakefield Cadman’s American music.

‘The part of the tenor was, if anything, more fatuous and stupid than the usual tenor part. The music was very high and very ineffective. I remember appealing to Joe Redding to tell me how in the name of music I was to phrase the strange sentence, “Tell me, gentle maiden, have I seen you in my dreams, I wonder?” “I wonder” flummoxed me altogether, and I am damned if I know now how *Natoma* could tell him whether he had seen her in his dreams. Still, queer things happen in opera libretti.’

v

The first performance of *Natoma* was a great occasion. Almost every newspaper in the country sent a representative, and the atmosphere was electric. The singers, the chorus, and the orchestra were all keyed up to give of

their best. Campanini was like a horse champing at the bit. Victor Herbert perspired and looked like a beetroot. Joe Redding was outwardly calm, but burnt-up inside.

All in all, the performance went with a swing. John, full of enthusiasm, sang and acted as well as he knew how. Victor Herbert was very flattering to him afterwards, and gave him his photograph with all the motifs of the opera written on it.

The company gave the opera in New York at the Metropolitan two weeks later, but it never caught on. Now it lies on John's library shelf accumulating dust; and composer, librettist, and conductor have passed to their reward.

'I have often wondered,' he said, 'if there is any greater speculation in the world of art than writing a grand opera. The poor composer, bitten by the fatal bug, gets the libretto. He studies it, he re-studies it, he digests it, he visualizes it on the stage, he considers its possible dramatic appeal, and then he calls upon his muse to inspire him. After two or three years of heart-breaking work and brain fag—not to mention eye fag—he shows it to some impresario. The impresario decides to take a chance and produce it—with no remuneration to the poor musical slave, of course, till most of the expenses are paid. Then come tedious rehearsals with orchestra, conductor, singers, stage managers, and the whole pack of them.'

'At last, the first performance! Everything goes well. The public seems pleased, and the impresario is enthusiastic. The poor composer says to himself: "It was a hard tussle and a terrible grind, but I think it was worth it."

'He is awake at cock-crow to read the notices. He seizes the papers with trembling hands, and as often as not, a mist of tears fills his weary eyes, as he sees his four or five years' hard work dismissed with supercilious reference to the Wagner influence in the first act, the Debussy atmosphere

in the second, and the want of an individual idiom in the third. Bah!"

John banged his fist on the lid of the piano.

'To me, the whole thing is unspeakably cruel. I don't for one moment question the good faith of the men who write these criticisms, but I think, and I always will think, that it is grossly unfair to damn a musician's hard work on one or two hearings. After all, it is infinitely easier to criticize than to create, and it is not my idea of criticism to harp on similarity in phrases or harmony with the great ones of the art. Absolute originality is impossible in music. What difference does it make to the musical whole that there are likenesses in two works?

'The *scherzo* from the F Major Violin and Piano Sonata of Beethoven is none the less a great work because it is taken bodily from the Gregorian chant, "*Adoro te Devote.*" What difference does it make to the musical worth of Verdi's *Otello* that in the monologue, "*Oh pianto oh duol,*" the master used a long phrase absolutely identical with a phrase in Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*, with the same harmonies? Does it detract from the originality of *La Bohème* that it opens with the same phrase as the Liszt E Flat Concerto? Or of *Butterfly*, that Puccini remembered *The Bartered Bride* overture of Smetana?

'You, Leonard—yes, you!—you don't know what it is like. You can't know. If you get an adverse criticism, you still have your book. The painter still has his picture. The sculptor still has his statue. But the poor composer has only his memories, some sweet, some ineffably sad—memories of perhaps one or two performances, after his long, weary struggle.

'As I said before, I have no grouse against music critics. They are not always decrying the efforts of young composers, they are not always looking for Wagner influences and Debussy atmospheres. But, on the average, they praise

less than they blame. They are quicker to see the influence of one of the great masters than to discover originality. And you can see why. Sure, it is much easier to recognize a friend, or even a chance acquaintance, than someone you never met before.'

All in all, the Chicago-Philadelphia season, if not interesting artistically, was by no means unprofitable. The sales from the gramophone records were increasing by leaps and bounds, and were making a very useful addition to John's income. It was during that season that John made the best record he ever made in his life—*'Il mio tesoro,'* from his beloved *Don Giovanni*. This record has had the unstinted admiration of musicians and critics ever since it was made; but the judgment that pleased John the best was the approval of George Bernard Shaw.

'If I were to be judged on the strength of one single record,' he says, 'I'd be content to let my reputation rest on that record of "*Il mio tesoro.*"'

VI

The Grand Season of 1911 was notable for the gala performance given in honour of the Coronation of King George V. This performance left completely in the shade the gala performance of 1908. The programme was brilliant, but more moving than anything that happened on the stage was the entrance of the King and Queen into the gorgeously decorated opera house, and the roll of drums before the orchestra broke into the National Anthem. So electric was the thrill of this entrance that the composure of the singers was badly affected; while in the audience the excitement was so great that one man in the stalls fell dead during the National Anthem, and was unnoticed till people resumed their seats.

John was honoured with an invitation to sing on this occasion, but his share was very modest. He sang with Tetrazzini, Sammarco, and Vanni Marcoux in the Lesson scene from *The Barber of Seville*.

As Rosina, Tetrazzini excelled herself. Her display of vocal fireworks in the 'Carnival of Venice' was almost incredible. Everything in the coloratura trick-box was out on display, and she even found a few new tricks for the occasion.

'The coloratura soprano of to-day,' said John—'and, by the way, it is a form of singing I abhor—the coloratura soprano of to-day sounds like a badly frightened canary. She lets out a series of disconnected pip-squeaks. But Tetrazzini was a lyric soprano who could also sing coloratura, and did.'

Her colleagues on this occasion had little to do, and did it creditably. Sammarco was a magnificent Figaro, and Vanni Marcoux an incomparable Don Basilio. The French bass, well established even by then, had a long and remarkable career in front of him. He was singing in Monte Carlo, still in splendid voice, twenty-five years after that. For all I know, he may be singing still.

The second item on the programme was an act of *Aida*, with Emmy Destinn, Paul Franz, and Dinh Gilly. Franz, who had a tenor voice of heroic volume, was a fine singer, but Destinn dominated the performance.

The programme was rounded off by the Russian Ballet.

VII

Apart from this gala performance, the high-light of the 1911 season was the London première of *The Girl of the Golden West*. Destinn once more gave a glorious vocal performance, but her appearance and her acting were as unsuitable to the part as in New York.

'My old friend Dinh Gilly played the sheriff and was magnificent. In fact, I never saw anyone approach him in this part. I know Dinh will forgive me for saying that not even his mother could call him handsome; but he was a fine figure of a man, and the ruggedness of his features added character to his performance.'

The cowboy was again Amedo Bassi. Later in the season the part was taken by the American tenor Riccardo Martin, and the year following by Giovanni Martinelli, a fine tenor and a great artist.

When John had come back from America, he had taught Cyril, then four years old, the waltz from the Puccini opera. The child had a quick ear, and sang this all over the house and through the neighbours' fences.

Two or three Sundays before the first performance in London, Tetrazzini asked Lily and John to tea and told them to be sure and bring the children. On arrival at the house, the first person Cyril ran into was Campanini. (Campanini was Tetrazzini's brother-in-law.)

Cyril accosted the conductor with the completest confidence.

'Mr. Campanini,' he said. 'Do you know the waltz from *The Girl of the Golden West*? Because if you don't, I will sing it for you.'

He proceeded to do so, with complete aplomb. Campanini was flabbergasted. The opera had not yet been heard in London, and here was a baby singing one of the principal motifs. Suddenly he looked at John.

'Oh, Giovanni,' he exclaimed, 'you have done this on purpose.'

VIII

As had been arranged in his contract, John cut the Grand Season in half so as to tour Australia with Melba.

Lily and the children went on ahead on the old Blue Star liner *Themistocles*, sailing round the Cape to avoid the terrific heat of the Red Sea in July.

John soon had reason to approve their choice. Stopping to give a concert in Paris, he set out from Marseilles for Sydney in an old-fashioned tub called the *Ophir*. The *Ophir* has long ceased to disturb the ocean and those who sailed upon its breast. She had been the vessel chosen to bring the Duke and Duchess of York, afterwards King George V and Queen Mary, on their first trip to Australia in the 'nineties. She brought John safely, too, but the trip through the Red Sea out-sweltered anything he had been able to imagine. He gave himself up for dead: he longed to die. Instead, he sweated and stifled in a heat that seemed beyond the power of man to support.

The *Ophir* crossed the Indian Ocean in a dead calm, escorted by eight or ten albatrosses. John watched them fascinated for hours, admiring that poetry of motion, that perfect minimum of exertion. Again and again he found the lines of 'The Ancient Mariner' sounding in his head.

He felt better now that Aden was passed, and he was practising every day. This trip provides one of the far-off links with him to which I have referred in the Foreword. A colonial bishop, father of a great school friend of mine, was travelling on the same boat, and spoke of the joy of hearing John's voice daily, even through closed doors.

The *Ophir* arrived at Colombo early in the morning. Before leaving London, John had been warned not to miss seeing the sunrise there. He remembered the warning, and was rewarded with a sight which he never forgot.

The dawn began to reach up into the tremendous height of the sky, and a mountain appeared, silhouetted against the crimson fingers. As the sun rose, the silhouette of the mountain became fainter and fainter. By the time the sun was fairly up in the sky, the mountain had completely dis-

appeared. Unable to believe his eyes, John searched many times that morning with his binoculars to find the mountain, but could not. The fancy struck him that it was like a curtain, which, instead of being pulled up, sank so as to unveil the sun.

He was to visit Colombo three times more, and each time to be thrilled by the same beautiful and strange experience.

When the *Ophir* reached Fremantle, the port of Perth, a number of Irish men and women were on the quay to welcome their compatriot, and introduce him to the people.

John spent happy hours in Perth on that first day. Although he was in the town three or four times during his career, he never sang there. This he always regrets, since he met there many people whom he liked.

From Perth, John went across the great Australian Bight to Adelaide. The Bight has a worse reputation than the Bay of Biscay. John encountered a tremendous swell which seemed to come all the way from the South Pole, but never saw a white cap. However, the swell was more than enough.

Adelaide he always regards as the loveliest city in Australia. Its position is beautiful, its climate magnificent, and he found it more cosmopolitan than Sydney, or Melbourne, or Brisbane. It was the scene of some of the happiest hours he ever spent.

On arrival John was greeted by the usual army of photographers and press interviewers. In those far-away days

these visitations, besides being absolutely necessary as publicity, were a real pleasure. No one had yet dreamed of the crowds of autograph hunters, whipped up by press agents, which came with the growth of the motion-picture industry. If anyone asked for an autograph in 1911, it was a compliment indeed. John was thrilled when an amateur photographer asked him to pose for a picture. He would not be thrilled to-day, when the autograph fiend is a pest to artists and public alike. The campaigns of movie-stars' press agents to trumpet the sexual attractions of the star provoked John to comment I had better not set down.

'Would you believe this?' he shouted. 'A Hollywood press agent actually had two charming maidens hide under the bed of a star as he sailed for Europe, and got them to stick their silly heads from under it just as the photographer's bulb flashed.

'If a man thinks he is Napoleon, you shove him into an asylum. If a press agent tries to tell the public that his star is Casanova, he should be treated the same way.

'And mind you, no one is more disgusted by all this flapdoodle than the poor victim. I have spoken with practically every big star in Hollywood—as fine a bunch of men as you could meet in any profession—and I can assure these shrieking maidens and simpering misses that, if they heard what their idols said about them, they would throw ten fits.'

The train journey to Sydney was in those days none too fast or comfortable. South Australia had one gauge, Victoria another, and New South Wales went back to the first again, so that in a journey of eight hundred miles one had to change trains twice. John was told that Victoria was jealous of the rest of Australia, and insisted on having a gauge of its own, just to be exclusive.

He had heard a great deal about the beauty of Sydney

harbour, but ever since he saw it first, he has allowed its sons to say all they like about it.

'I have seen it from the ocean, I have seen it from both towering Heads, I have sailed into its every bay, and it remains for me a monument to the Creator of all Beauty.'

CHAPTER 10

THE COMPANY OPENED on September the 2nd at His Majesty's Theatre with *Traviata*. According to the press, no such brilliant audience had ever assembled in Australia.

This was not surprising, since Melba had come home to her own country. She had sung there in concerts many times, but now she was to sing in opera, and show Australians how an Australian had conquered the world.

Melba gave an inspired performance. There was real warmth in her singing, and she was obviously moved by the ovation she received. In the front row, leading the applause, was her old father, who sat beaming on all around him.

Afterwards, Melba told the audience that she had realized her life's ambition.

'I have brought Covent Garden to Australia,' she said.

Angelo Scandiani, who had sung with John on the night of his début, sang Père Germont, and John was the Alfredo. Both sang well, and shared in the triumph, as did the young conductor, Giuseppe Angelini.

The press notices were enthusiastic, and spoke of John in superlative terms. They did not hesitate to speak of 'a triumph for Melba and McCormack.' Photographs of John appeared everywhere, and his car, which he had just bought, came in for a great deal of attention.

The question of publicity, and its effect upon the artist, has never been fully investigated. Every man or woman who appears regularly in public has to face the problem

of developing a public as distinct from a private personality. The personality is part of the stock in trade, and the artist instinctively tries to make it an asset. He is anxious to attract.

Few things are more interesting than to see how different characters face this problem. Some solve the problem completely, by the adoption of a mask, a second personality which is still informed by the real personality. Others are wholly insincere in their public personality. Others, and these are the least fortunate, get the two so inextricably mixed as to be incapable of complete sincerity in either.

John met the problem squarely. It did not offer him the difficulties it offers to so many. Frank, generous, impulsive, capable like most Irishmen of moderate and genuine cordiality, he could respond without insincerity to the various demands, assaults, flatteries, hints, and pleas that beset the successful public man, and particularly the artist. He could enjoy the ballyhoo without being led away by it. He came quickly to know who he was and what he was worth. A fundamental simplicity of character pulled him through.

II

There were many old friends of John's in the company, and he made a very pleasant new friend. This was Angelini, the conductor. Angelini was a splendid musician. He kept the company in excellent order without being at all a martinet, and was handsome and charming into the bargain. He made a very great success in Australia. He liked John as much as John liked him, and pressed John into his service as interpreter.

This position was not altogether a sinecure. At one of the innumerable parties given for the company by the hospitable Australians, Angelini wanted to tell one of the guests how lovely he thought her. His English vocabulary was extremely small, and the lady had no Italian. Accordingly, he summoned John, and poured forth an impassioned stream of praises. John entered into the spirit of the thing with great gusto. He translated into rhapsodical Irish the passionate Italian of his friend. At the climax of his rhapsody, he caught a glint in Lily's black eyes. She had heard only the translation. Very sheepishly he explained. 'I wished I could have translated myself to a safe distance.'

'I have had more than thirty years of public life,' John declared, 'and nowhere have I found a more music-loving people than the Australians. Mind you, they have their faults—and plenty of them. They are insular. They listen passionately to the side of a story they wish to hear. The idea of giving anyone the benefit of the doubt is almost impossible to them. Press propaganda is truth, and gossip is inspired.

'But they are wonderfully musical and gloriously enthusiastic. Their taste is excellent. No audience in the world compares with an Australian audience in its hunger for the really beautiful things in music. This is not only my experience, but that of every performer who has gone there. I will never forget their kindness to me personally in those early days. Nor will I forget their cruelty when silly propaganda charged me with all kinds of offences. Even my undying love for the land of my birth, and my unchanging belief in her inalienable right to be free, were charged against me as crimes.

'But I am getting ahead of my story—and you don't like that, I know. God, what a bully the man is. I *like* to go jumping about in my life, as the whim takes me. I don't

believe in all this pedantic arranging of things in order.'

'I know you don't,' I replied. 'I go walking up and down this life of yours like a park keeper picking up bits of paper on the end of a stick.'

III

The season progressed, and, as the press cuttings show, press and audiences grew more and more enthusiastic. The audiences now had their set favourites, whom they would call before the curtain by name. This could be embarrassing, and it did not always please the diva. But John, though the prime favourite of the audiences after Melba, remained on excellent terms with her.

One night he was prevented by a sudden attack of hoarseness from singing *Faust*. The company's doctor, Herbert Marks, worked all day on him to try and bring his voice back, but to no purpose. Albert Quesnell, a good friend of John's, had to go on instead. When the announcement was made from the stage, the gallery set up a song of 'We want John McCormack,' which lasted until the orchestra began the overture. This was taken very well by the good-natured Quesnell, whose only comeback was to say that he never thought John's name would sound so badly when sung by a chorus.

There was an excellent spirit throughout the company, and all worked with a will. Everybody, from Melba to the lowliest chorister or stage hand, wanted the season to be a huge success. In the first fortnight the company rehearsed and produced seven operas, and the performances were all of excellent standard. The operas were *Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *Faust*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Bohème*, *Butterfly*, and

Tosca, all given in the original language with a ninety per cent Australian orchestra and a ninety per cent Australian chorus. The audiences were proud of their chorus and orchestra, as they had every right to be, and the visitors were proud to be identified with them.

One of the outstanding singers of the company was Madame Wayda, the Polish soprano already mentioned as a member of the Chicago-Philadelphia Opera Company. She sang later on at Covent Garden with very considerable success, but she had one characteristic which made things difficult for her colleagues, and that was to sing with extreme slowness. Sometimes she sang so slowly as to seem the forerunner of the torch singer and the crooner; though, unlike theirs, the sound she made was beautiful.

IV

It was during this season at Sydney that John first sang Romeo. He has never forgotten the first night. The heat was terrific: the thermometer in the wings stood at ninety-five. John had studied the part assiduously. He had costumes made in London, and a wig by Clarkson. He had taken lessons in fencing in case he should try to use a sword like a shillelagh. On the opening night, he felt that he looked the part. He did not think he had acted it too badly, and he knew that he had sung it fairly well.

When he arrived back at the hotel, therefore, he expected Lily to make a great fuss of him.

All he got was, 'Hullo, John! I thought your wig was awful.'

His face fell, his eyes filled with tears.

'I have often got back at her since,' he said with relish.

'When she is wearing her loveliest frock and looking like her daughter's sister, and waiting to be told so, I say to her "Hullo, Lily! your hat's on crooked." I always get the same reply, "Is that so, Romeo?"'

In the final scene of the opera, Melba and John had rehearsed a beautiful tableau, showing the dead Juliet lying draped across Romeo's body. On the first night, Melba threw herself across his feet as he lay stretched along the steps of her catafalque. She was no feather-weight, and gave him excruciating pain across the instep. He bore the pain with fortitude for the sake of the tableau, but as soon as the curtain had dropped he tried to wriggle free.

'No, John,' Melba whispered loudly. 'Hold it for the tableau.'

But the pain was too intense. To her great joy, and that of the people in the first rows, John retorted audibly, 'Tableau be damned! Get off my foot.'

Melba would often tell this story afterwards, trying hard to imitate John's accent. At this she was not very successful. Her gift of imitation was limited, though she could do a Sydney larrikin to perfection.

v

The season finished off at Sydney in a blaze of glory for all concerned. Melba was at her best, and did not spare herself. The company started for Melbourne full of enthusiasm, determined to do even better; for this was the city where Melba was born, and from which she had taken her name.

Strangely enough, the season in Melbourne was not nearly so successful. Melba did not sing so well. She

seemed to sense an antagonistic feeling in the press. Then she caught cold after cold, and had to cancel some of her performances. She became depressed, and one night, as they walked up and down the stage in the second act of *La Bohème*, she told John that she had decided to cut short the Melbourne season and return to Sydney for a farewell fortnight.

John was flabbergasted. He had taken a charming house in one of Melbourne's beautiful suburbs for the whole season, and the children were having a glorious time. Now he had to pack up and return to Sydney, leaving the family behind.

He began to expostulate and protest. He pointed out to Melba the great expense of such a move; but she would not listen. Never did he sing the love music of *La Bohème* with less enthusiasm than that night.

He was all the angrier because he was having such a good time personally. The audiences took him to their hearts, and the critics were enthusiastic. One, writing in the *Melbourne Society* of his performance in *Rigoletto*, said that McCormack was head and shoulders above everybody in the cast.

Proudly John bore this home and showed it to Lily. Lily was delighted to see it in print.

'Of course, it's not true,' she said.

John grinned, 'I know it's not true. But it sounds good.'

Apart from his work, he had made a great number of friends. Moreover, he had been playing cricket. The opera company had its own team, of which John was a member. On the day after the first performance of *Romeo et Juliette*, the team played a scratch eleven on the Fitzroy Ground.

John was in great form. He made the highest score of his life—51. This feat was largely due to the encouragement of a crowd which applauded every stroke with cries



JOHN MC CORMACK AS
GOLFER AND ANGLER

of ‘Good old Romeo!’ and ‘Go on, John! sock it into Juliette’s garden.’

After reaching his 51, John was so breathless that he had to sit on his splice for a quarter of an hour. Recovered, he tried to pull a long hop into Adelaide, and was bowled.

A great deal of his spare time was spent watching the test matches as the guest of Victor Trumper.

‘I wish some of my American friends who dismiss cricket as an old man’s game could have seen Victor,’ he said. ‘Sticky wicket or plumb, crumbling wicket in Manchester or billiard table in Sydney, it was all the same to Victor. Here was a co-ordination of eye and foot and wrist that I have never seen approached. I have seen Fry’s late cuts, I have watched Ranji drive a slow googly from Albert Trott into the pavilion at Lord’s, I have seen Jessop pull a fast bowler from the off stump to the square-leg boundary. I have seen Ken Hutchings drive a half-volley from Tibby Cotter over Tibby’s head into the stands at Melbourne, and as the ball passed Tibby he ducked; I have seen Charlie MacCartney score a century before lunch in a test match. But Victor Trumper was the master of them all. From the moment he left the pavilion with his brown cap pulled over his eyes, until he came back after making ten or two hundred, he was my ideal batsman and my ideal sportsman. When people say of something that it is “not cricket,” I think they must have seen Victor Trumper. Cricket requires eyes and wrist and foot and guts. It is a game played by the players, not by some raucous-voiced person on the side lines.

‘I have seen a great deal of baseball in America, but I have never been able to reconcile myself to the continuous razzing of the pitcher—not by partisans of the team, mind you, but by the manager of the opposing team. My old friend John McGraw used to say to me: “That noise and stuff gets the players all steamed up. It’s part of the strat-

egy of the game." It may be. All I know is that it gets me worked up into such a state of frenzy I can't enjoy the game.'

And now, at the whim of a disappointed prima donna, John had to leave all this and go to Sydney alone.

The company, already depressed at this premature finish to the Melbourne season, were thrown into real gloom by the death of a colleague. Dammacco, the principal bass, fell suddenly ill and died. His had been one of the outstanding successes of the tour. He had a fine manly voice, was an excellent actor, and seemed destined for a great career.

VI

Sydney made an even greater fuss of the company when they returned for their farewell fortnight. They seemed to realize the compliment that Melba was paying them. There was a strong rivalry between the two cities, Sydney and Melbourne, and the Sydney public were flattered by Melba's return, since it proved to their minds that they were the more musically minded and had the better taste.

The season closed, as it had opened, in a grand gala. The old His Majesty's Theatre was crowded with a wildly enthusiastic audience. The last chord had been played, and the stage was a mass of flowers from the admirers of all the singers. The bouquets varied from simple bunches of violets to huge wreaths of silvered laurel. Melba stood in the middle of the stage, surrounded by the colleagues who had done their utmost to make her visit a success.

'Speech, speech, speech!' yelled the audience.

Melba raised a hand, and stepped forward. Instantly silence fell. The singers looked at one another. Melba was going to be generous. All those stories they had heard of

her petty jealousies, her want of generosity to her colleagues, were just spiteful invention.

Then Melba spoke.

'I want to thank you all,' she said, 'for supporting our opera company. But I want to thank you especially for coming on the nights when *I* did not sing.'

The singers stared. It was not possible. They could not be hearing aright. No one could be so unspeakably ungracious, so ungrateful. Hot protests rose to their lips, for, in Melbourne especially, they had kept the season going when Melba was ill and could not sing.

Then, suddenly, the strain was eased. The ridiculous side of the thing struck them, and a gale of laughter swept through the company.

Melba stepped back bowing, acknowledging the applause, and found herself surrounded by laughing faces.

'What are you all laughing at?' she enquired.

Nobody told her.

VII

John stayed in Australia well over into the new year. On his return to Melbourne he sang in *The Messiah* on Christmas night in the huge Exhibition Building. During the afternoon rain fell in such torrents that everyone was afraid half the audience would be kept away. It was, of course, midsummer in Australia. Luckily, at about six in the evening the rain took off, and a magnificent sunset brought the people pouring out of their homes.

John had had a special reason for being concerned about the size of the audience. When the Philharmonic Society approached him to sing, he named a fee which struck them as too high. Instead, they persuaded him to accept a per-

centage of the receipts. So huge was the audience that his cheque turned out to be far more than the fee he had originally asked.

The performance reached an extraordinary level. One of those mysterious waves of enthusiasm and co-operation between the audience and the artists inspired principals, chorus, and orchestra alike.

Something of the regard in which John was already held is shown by the advertisements in the local papers which ran like this:

Soloists:

Miss Lilian Reid.
Mdlle. Voluntas-Ranzenberg.
Mr. John McCormack.
Mr. John McCormack.
Mr. John McCormack.
Mr. Horace Stevens.

It was invidious: it was quite indefensible: but that was how they printed it.

On New Year's Day of 1912 John sang his first concert in Australia in the same huge building. With him appeared a young New Zealand soprano who was also a member of the Melba Opera Company, and who was presently to make a great success in England. She was Rosina Buckman, now the wife of that fine tenor and admirable musician, Maurice D'Oisly.

An extra link, since forged between them and John, is that they have often been examiners at the *Feis* in Dublin which gave him his start.

This first concert was a tremendous success with both public and press. By special request, John sang a number of Irish ballads. One notice, from the *Melbourne Australasian*, gave John such pleasure and amusement that he framed it. It ran as follows:

'If the Irish boy is not known in a very few years as one of the greatest tenors in the world, it will probably be because a careless builder dropped a warehouse or a terrace on him as he was passing.'

Immediately after the New Year's Day concert, the children left for home with their beloved aunt. They sailed with several members of the Melba Opera Company. Melba stayed in Australia: Lily and John returned to Sydney, where he gave two concerts before sailing for America via New Zealand. John thoroughly enjoyed the two concerts, which gave him a foretaste of the joy he was to have in after years singing to that enthusiastic and receptive audience.

The journey to New Zealand was an unpleasant surprise. Like most people who calculate distances on a map which has not been drawn to scale, the pair thought of the journey as a sort of trip from Dublin to Liverpool. One settled down to be uncomfortable if not sick, to console oneself with the reflection that it was only an overnight trip and would soon be over.

When John and Lily got outside Sydney Heads on the good ship *Moeraki*, they thought all was going to be over then and there. The ship did more pirouettes and turns and dips and twists than Genée or Pavlova at her most delirious. From sitting in their deck chairs, John and Lily soon found themselves in the scuppers.

'We laboriously worked our way to our cabin and lay down,' John relates, 'only to find ourselves on the floor rolling round like empty barrels loose on a Guinness barge in a nor'wester outside Dublin Bay.'

The state of affairs so elegantly described lasted for three days and three nights. On the third night the pair gave themselves up for lost. A great wave broke the port window and flooded the cabin, drenching both of them and all their belongings. They were scared to death, but

the relief of finding themselves alive was so great that they began to laugh.

Next morning, as if to atone, the sun shone gloriously and the sea was molten gold.

'For sheer scenic beauty, I have never seen a country to beat New Zealand. I have travelled over both the North and South Islands, I have been from Auckland to Wellington and from Christchurch to Dunedin; and for variety of scenery New Zealand comes out top. Add to this a charming, kindly, hospitable, broad-minded people, and I challenge the world on behalf of New Zealand—God bless her! My concerts in Wellington and Auckland were a great delight.'

'I had marvellous audiences, from the point of numbers as well as enthusiasm. All the same, it is a fact that I have always had more real pleasure in singing for a small audience which I knew to be friendly than for a large one that I had to convince. I have had a good deal of experience of both types. One Sunday night long ago, I sang at a concert in Scarborough. The holding of Sunday concerts was a new venture, much resented by the church-going people, who looked on them as sacrilegious. We Catholics feel differently about that, thank God! At all events, we had an audience of about thirteen or fourteen, and I sang the same number of songs as there were members of the audience. It was like singing in your own drawing-room to a group of friends.'

'I have been told I always sang better for a small audience than for a big one. I have felt that myself too. Rachmaninov, I remember, had the same feeling. He said that it was affection and admiration that brought the small audience, but in a large audience there was always an element of curiosity.'

The second concert in Auckland brought to an end John's first visit Down Under. At it he scored by far the

greatest personal success of his life up till that time. Lily and he were tremendously entertained, and made many a friend. Some of them proved less even than fair-weather friends—but the great majority remained and remain faithful.

'I have never asked that a friend should agree with everything that I did. I have always believed firmly in what Emerson said in his essay on Friendship—"I would rather be a thorn in the side of my friend than his echo." Well—I have never minded the thorn pricks coming from my friends, but I have the utmost contempt for the so-called friend who hides the thorn in a velvet glove.

'I have a good old friend who thinks the same, although he expresses it better. That is Colonel Fritz Bräse, that excellent and serious musician, the first Musical Director of the Irish Free State Army Band. I remember one day he said to me in Dublin, "*Mein geliebter Herr Graf*, I cannot suffer the man who puts both hands round your neck and stabs you in the back with the other."'

VIII

Lily and John left New Zealand for Vancouver on the S.S. *Marama*. They stayed at Suva for eight or nine hours, seeing practically nothing, as they were in the middle of the rainy season, then went to Honolulu.

In 1912 Honolulu had yet to be discovered by Hollywood. Simple and little advertised though it was, a concert was arranged for John on his arrival. The auditorium, a large one, was used chiefly by the United States Army for physical jerks. It was excellent for sound, but unfortunately the roof was made of corrugated iron. When a real

tropical rain storm fell, or, even worse, a shower of hail, conditions were not of the best for John's *pianissimi*.

Everything went splendidly till John found himself at the most intense moment of the second verse of 'Mother Machree.' As he reached the phrase 'Oh, God bless you and keep you,' a torrential shower fell on the iron roof. John stopped dead—he had to. After three or four minutes, the rain ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and, to the intense amusement of the audience, he sang the final words of the song.

'I have always been tremendously concentrated on my work as I sang. Whenever I have let my mind wander during a song, no matter how trivial the song happened to be and how well I knew it, I have invariably dried up.'

'You will never believe me, but one night I dried up in "I Hear You Calling Me." After I had been singing it for nearly twenty years too. You know I always have the words of my songs in a little book. Well, I had given up having the words of this one, for I knew it in my sleep. On this particular night, I lost my concentration in the second verse and dried up altogether. I stood gaping on the platform, when a young lady in the middle of the hall came to the rescue. She called out loudly "Oh, John—And Oh the ringing gladness of your voice."

'Believe it or not, that was the line that had slipped my memory. The audience cheered the implied compliment, and I was deeply grateful for the prompt.'

IX

After a splendid trip, John and Lily arrived in Victoria, British Columbia. At the end of the usual customs formalities, they got into a large taxi-cab and drove to the Hotel

Victoria. John asked the driver how much he owed him, and the driver named a figure. It seemed high, and John said so.

The driver put his head on one side.

'Now, John,' he said in a rich Kerry accent, 'sure it's nothing to what I have to pay for your records, not to mention the tickets for to-morrow night's concert.'

'I felt ashamed of meself,' said John, 'but I hope I made up to the Kerry taxi driver before I left Victoria. He said I did!'

From Victoria they went by boat to Seattle, enjoying to the full the beauties of the trip and the luxury of the Canadian Pacific Railway steamer. The next stopping place was Portland, where John signed the contract which really began his American concert career. The concerts he was singing at the moment were part of his contract with the Chicago-Philadelphia Opera Company, who had an option on his services till the end of the following season.

The year before, John had met in St. Paul a vigorous and energetic young manager who was full of enthusiasm about his singing, and saw possibilities of great success for a young Irishman who could sing Irish songs well. This man had suggested a contract but, since John was already signed up, he could not then discuss the matter. He promised, however, that he would give the man first refusal when he was free.

When John arrived at the Multnomah Hotel at Portland, this manager, by name Charles Wagner, was there waiting for him. John was surprised to see him, and said as much. Wagner told him that he knew the option which the Chicago Company held upon him expired at the end of February, and that, if they did not renew his contract, he was free to sign a new one. Terms were discussed. Wagner offered a three years agreement, with a minimum of fifty concerts a season at seven hundred and fifty dollars

per concert for the first year, with increases for the second and third.

Lily and John were all enthusiasm. They discussed where they would stay in New York, whether they would bring the children over, what school they would go to, or whether it would be better to bring a governess. They discussed everything under the sun, until Lily suddenly stopped and exclaimed, 'But, John, you are not free to sign yet.'

'That is all right,' said Wagner. 'You will be—at midnight.'

There was nothing else to do, so the three dined together and waited up till midnight. Five minutes afterwards John signed his contract with Charlie Wagner. Wagner was a splendid and most capable manager and a good friend. The two worked together for many seasons, and parted company by mutual consent. It was an excellent association for both, bringing fame and money, and John has nothing but good to say of it.

From Portland the pair went to California. John's first concert under the new contract was in San Francisco. He sang at the Scottish Rite Auditorium on February the 27th, 1912. The hall was crowded to the doors. There was just room enough on the stage for the piano and for John. Nervous as a kitten, he walked on the platform for his first number. So perfunctory was the applause that he could hear the sound of his own footsteps.

John felt that the audience were saying, 'You are welcome, young man. We have heard a lot about your singing, but we want to judge for ourselves. Now go on and sing.'

Saying a little prayer to St. Cecilia, he nodded to Spencer Clay at the piano, and began the concert with '*Che gelida manina*' from *La Bohème*.

Nowadays he abhors operatic arias on the concert stage. 'They are ridiculous and out of place,' he says, 'and lose

everything that gives them any artistic value, either musically or dramatically.'

Be that as it may, he must have sung this aria with conviction, for at its close he received one of the greatest ovations of his life. For the rest of the concert he was on air. When he finished his Irish group, it was easy to see to what race the majority of the audience belonged. The press notices were marvellous, and, before he left San Francisco on that first visit, he sang at three more concerts, all in the space of a week.

From there John went to Los Angeles, where Julian Johnson, the musical critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, produced another notice to be framed and go on the wall.

'... Such limpid use of the voice, such a delicate command of portamento, such mezza voce, such round, luscious, appealing, ringing tone, floating on the breath and formed apparently without the slightest physical limitation or throaty pressure—to tell the truth, all these things do not seem logical or even sane in these days of passion-tattering.

'... McCormack is by no means intense. "*Vesti la giubba*" by no means swims into his ken, though by another paradox he is a superb Cavaradossi and a tragic and almost matchless Edgardo. But would you have a diamond glow red, or a soft sunset embattled with clangorous lightning? There are enough opals and rubies—a sufficiency of Carusos and Dalmores, while of the expiring Bonci race only McCormack appears to upbear the white standard of bel canto pure and undefiled.'

When things like this are written about an artist, they put him in grave danger. The young and foolish may believe he has nothing left to learn, and, even if the artist escape this fate, his ears may be closed to quieter judgments, more judiciously expressed. John's comment is that it was a good thing for all concerned that, when he got back to London and Covent Garden, he was brought down to earth again by a good wholesome drubbing from an English critic.

The rest of this short tour brought John to Omaha, Denver, Cleveland, Detroit, and then Chicago.

Spencer Clay had gone with him as accompanist, but he wanted to go back to London and teach, so at Chicago John had to find someone else. Since he had signed with Charlie Wagner, his manager had dinned in his ears the merits of a certain American accompanist.

'The best thing about him,' Wagner said, 'is that on top of being such a good musician, he is very placid in temperament, and does not lose his temper no matter how much he is provoked. He would be ideal for you.'

John guffawed. He did not believe that such a person existed. Then, one morning, Wagner rang him up to say that Clarence Whitehill wanted him to go for a cocktail to his room at the Blackstone Hotel.

When John got there, Whitehill was rehearsing some songs of Schubert. He gave John a nod, and went on. As soon as he had finished, he said, 'John, I want you to meet the finest accompanist in America, and our grandest colleague. Teddy Schneider—John McCormack.'

From that day, from that moment in fact, began an association which did not end officially till the 16th of March 1937, and an affectionate friendship which will last as long as both men live. The benign figure of Edwin Schneider at the piano was as much a part of a McCormack recital as the little note-book or 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl.'

At Detroit, John was welcomed by a number of Irishmen under the presidency of Father Dennis Tighe, who had been with him at Sligo College. There was also a poem of welcome by an old Irish patriot, William J. Dawson, who had been a friend of Parnell and Justin McCarthy. It was not great poetry, but it touched John's heart and

made him feel that he had a mission in his work: to keep alive the love of Irishmen for the land of their birth, and to make all Americans appreciate the fact that Ireland had a store of folk-song second to none, and that every song which included words like macushla, mavourneen, alanna, bedad, and begorrah was not therefore authentic. When John began his concert tours in America, most Americans, even those of Irish descent, regarded these words as the hall-mark. The composer might not know whether the river Shannon flowed into the lakes of Killarney, or whether Cork City was on the banks of Lough Neagh, but as long as he brought in something about Machree or Avourneen, his song was Irish.

From Detroit, John went to New York and gave a concert at the Carnegie Hall. Here his Kerry friend, Denis McSweeney, came back into the picture, and stayed there until his death in 1935. McSweeney's enthusiasm and his affectionate interest were contagious. He took over the Carnegie Hall concert and made it a huge success. He travelled to the New England states at his own expense, talking McCormack all the way, and carrying with him as samples John's gramophone records.

'I can say in all candour and with a heart full of gratitude that my American concert success in all the years to come was due more to the efforts of Denis McSweeney than to any other agency. I admit, of course, that I sang fairly well, and co-operated in every way I could with him. But without Denis McSweeney, I often wonder if there ever would have been a John McCormack.'

Whoever deserves the credit for it, John's concert success was astonishing. The following year it was greater than ever. Between November the 7th, 1912, and May the 6th, 1913, when he had to return for the Grand Season at Covent Garden, John gave sixty-seven concerts, and appeared in twelve performances of grand opera. On all but

two of these occasions the house was sold out. In New York alone, he gave twelve concerts for which the total attendance was fifty-eight thousand. At the last concert in New York, over seven thousand people were packed into the New York Hippodrome, five thousand were turned away, and John was obliged to give no fewer than eighteen encores.

These statistics naturally have no musical significance, but they proved the astonishing hold which John already had over American audiences, and they showed why he was so soon to say good-bye to the operatic stage in favour of the concert platform.

xI

Some reaction from these successes was only to be expected, and John found the London critics more reserved than those of America. Reports of his huge concert success had been assiduously spread by the Gramophone Company, and this, coupled with the fact that he was now no longer a novice, may have helped the critics to take a severer standard. When an artist has arrived, his good work is apt to be taken for granted. The occasions the critics notice are those when for one reason or another he falls below his best.

But John had too much new accomplishment to be passed over. When he sang in *The Barber of Seville* with Tetrazzini, the whole press was enthusiastic about his singing of the very difficult aria in the first act '*Ecco ridente in cielo.*' But no compliment pleased him so much as a letter from Sir John Murray Scott. Sir John had so often told him of Mario's excellence in this part that praise from him went deeper than any other's.

John was particularly gratified by his success in *Il Barbiere*, because he had studied it particularly hard. He wanted to sing it like an Italian—or rather, he wanted to sing the recitatives like an Italian. Tetrazzini, on the other hand, was determined to pay a compliment to her English admirers by interpolating into the Lesson scene a song in English. John tried his best to dissuade her, since her English diction was extremely odd. It was no use: she was determined to sing an English song. Her choice fell on Sir Frederick Cowen's 'The Swallows.' This song was written for that excellent singer, Evangeline Florence. Even when she sang it, admirable though her diction was, the words were difficult to follow. But when Tetrazzini began to sing—

I have opened wide my lattice
Letting in the laughing breeze,
Telling happy stories
To the flowers and the trees.

the result, in so far as it was comprehensible at all, suggested what went on outside the opera house rather than within it. John heard as far as 'Hi ave hopened wida my lettuce'—the rest was indistinguishable.

The press next day was restrained on the subject of this interpolation. One critic professed not to know in what language the lady was singing.

'But that,' John put in, 'could be said of many an English-speaking singer I have known. I believe it's because they think they will be heard without taking care. I can think of more than one singer of the front rank who had excellent diction in foreign languages, but whose English words were indistinguishable. I think this laziness, this taking it for granted, is at the bottom of the atrocious English diction one so often hears in England and America.'

CHAPTER II

SIR JOHN MURRAY SCOTT fell ill this year, and had to go down to the country to recuperate. John went down to see him whenever he could, and spent hours singing to him. A strong affection existed between the two. Sir John looked on 'Mac' almost as a son, and John gave his full affection in return. Some benefactors earn our full gratitude, but put a strain upon it because we cannot love them. John not only owed the older man his start: he would have loved him in any case.

As soon as the Covent Garden season was finished, John left for his first real concert tour of Australia and New Zealand. Teddy Schneider could not go with him, so he invited his old friend and first master, Vincent O'Brien, to go as accompanist. O'Brien got leave of absence from the Dublin Cathedral choir, and the pair met to plan the details of the tour.

'Mind ye, Vincent, it's a long trip,' John warned him. 'It will take us literally round the world. First to Australia, then New Zealand, then to Honolulu, and so on to America.'

O'Brien was tremendously impressed. He duly appeared at the boat, bringing with him a small trunk and a regular flock of small bags of all shapes and characters.

John commented rudely on these, but during the Australian part of the tour he did not notice them. As soon as they came to the United States, however, where the whole mixum gatherum of luggage was crowded into John's 'drawing-room' on the train, he noticed them very much indeed.

Finally, in Omaha, he lost patience. It was a bitterly cold night, and the pair were catching the midnight train to Chicago. John was all wrapped up after the concert, and nervous of catching cold. The house in Chicago was sold out, and there he had to stand on the icy platform and watch dear old Vincent O'Brien absorbedly counting his flock of bags as they went into the carriage.

At last John exploded.

'Vincent,' he exclaimed, 'why the hell didn't you bring a large trunk, instead of all these damn packages?'

Vincent turned to him with a quizzical look.

'Now, John,' said he, 'do you know, mind you, if you had told me I was going so far, I would have got a trunk.'

II

During these two years there was no time for a great deal of concert work in England, and John was soon off to America again. From now on, America was to claim more and more of his time. His contracts were solid, and it was only reasonable that the land that paid him so generously should call the tune. He was in the full power of young manhood, and strengthening an already excellent constitution.

He needed it, as a glance at his engagement book showed. The frequency with which he sang caused many older singers to shake their heads and warn him that he would wear out his voice prematurely. John knew better. Battistini was once asked how he had managed to preserve his voice so that, when he reached the age of sixty, it had all its old power and much of its old quality. He replied that he had always sung on the income of his voice, and never on the capital. John did the same. Warned by what

had happened to Bassi, Zenatello, and many another lyric tenor, he never attempted to force his voice or to sing more powerfully than Nature had intended. He used his voice naturally, taking a spontaneous delight in it, singing about the house, singing everywhere except in the open air. The voice knew best. It was made to be used, it gained its strength from being used, it became not coarser but more subtle, not louder but more varied: because it was used naturally and on the sound principles learned from the invaluable Maestro Sabatini.

Among the many stories told of John is one which I received direct from a man who claimed to have been there. This man alleged that one summer night the inhabitants of a street in Dublin were startled from their beds by the sound of marvellous and full-throated singing in the street. They put their heads out of the window, and saw in the moonlight John McCormack coming home after a good dinner, happy, and filling the night with the volume of his voice.

I always liked the story—but it is quite untrue. John has always had a horror of singing in the open air, for fear of damage to his voice. He has only done it twice, once at the request of the President of the United States, the other time at the great Eucharistic Congress in Dublin.

III

The season of 1913 was chiefly remarkable for the advent of Chaliapin. The giant Russian bass captured London on his first appearance. This was not at Covent Garden, but at Drury Lane. Though I was a schoolboy at the time, I can well remember the excitement which he caused. Until they heard him, people had not realized that a bass could not only be the hero of an opera, but could sing with the

flexibility, the appeal, the finish, the dramatic power of a Caruso. Hitherto, with a few notable exceptions, opera had looked on the bass as the handy man. Basses played priests, villains, aged fathers, buffo parts. Here, in *Boris*, was a part which gave a bass everything. And, beyond the tremendous power, the range, the expressiveness of his voice, Chaliapin was the greatest actor modern opera has known. He produced effects beyond the range of other artists, effects which enlarged the horizon of even experienced critics, and set a new standard.

John never sang with Chaliapin, but the two naturally met, and found a good deal to say to each other. Chaliapin, one size larger than human, almost as terrifying in his geniality as in the agonies of *Boris*, had a strong streak of peasant simplicity which found an answer in John; and John, with his immediate friendliness and his fund of stories, amused and delighted the huge Russian. Each came to have a great admiration for the other, and Chaliapin, that master of characterization, realized and appreciated to the full John's power of giving life to a ballad, of suggesting character by the colour of his voice, and flicking over a song with point as quick as a wink.

The two met again for the 1914 season. During this summer an invitation came to John to take part in the Salzburg Festival. Greatly complimented, he set out, and was in Ostend when a hasty wire came from Lily telling him, in view of the war situation, to go no further for the moment. When the war broke out, he was still in Ostend.

IV

The years 1914-18 made a break in many careers, even when they did not cut them short. The break in John's

was violent and decisive. The beginning of the war found him vocally at the summit of his powers. He was later to learn much in the way of interpretation, and to extend the range of his singing to music as yet beyond his scope. But, since the break is there, it is only natural to treat it as a break in the story. In the next chapter therefore we will pause and try to consider John's achievement.

CHAPTER 12

IT IS VERY difficult to write about any art but writing. Each has its peculiar secret, which cannot be expressed in another medium. Pavlova, when people asked the meaning of her swan dance, replied that she would not bother to dance it if it could be explained in words. One can write a little about painting, a little about acting, a little—a very little—about music. The good critic of these arts respects their inviolability. Knowing that soul and body are one, that the meaning is inseparable from the form, he never tries to pursue his subject farther than words will go. It was the distinction as critic of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, as it is the distinction of Mr. W. J. Turner, to recognize these limitations and to keep inside them.

The art of singing, with its resemblance to speech, might seem freer ground for the critic. Yet even here the written word can do little. The best criticism of faulty singing is to imitate it and then to sing the phrase aright, and no analysis of voice and style recreates them as satisfactorily as a good gramophone record. Those who never heard Tamagno cannot know how he sang; but they can tell, from his recording of Otello's death, and from the tremendous accents of his '*Ora e per sempre addio*,' that he must have been a great singer. Imperfect though the old recordings were, we need only hear the grace and ease with which Plançon takes the turns of *Le Véau d'Or* to realize how far bass singing has deteriorated.

A great deal has been lost: we cannot gauge volume

from the gramophone record, and are often left uncertain as to quality; but enough survives to be a real guide. When we talk of the singers of the 'nineties and early nineteen hundreds, we have more than report to go on. Even though the records be poor and few, and the items tawdry, we can hear a ghost of the voices that astounded our fathers. How pale a ghost, the singers themselves might be sorry to know; they might even prefer nothing, as did one fine singer of recent times, Dinh Gilly, who called in all his records: but we listeners are happy with what we have.

II

John's birth date was as lucky for lovers of singing as for himself. The first vigour of his developed voice coincided with the golden age of pre-war recording. He abandoned opera just at the right time. Opera, forcing the voice up and up, was well enough for the first years; but John's was a voice capable of the most sensitive shading, and its Irish quality might have been damaged in continual competition with an orchestra.

As a result, the records of more than twenty years preserve the successive stages of a voice that has outlasted those of most lyric tenors.

During the war of 1914-18, his voice was recorded at its full maturity. The advent of electrical recording found it past its first freshness, but the singer's musicianship and subtlety were at their highest. He continued to learn and to experiment, even after it became necessary to cope with the inevitable loss of freedom. The gramophone has therefore a complete record of his history. Even though many of his finest records are unpurchasable except from col-

lectors, his reputation is in safe keeping. None will be able to doubt him, as we doubt the Victorian tenors. Their quality reaches us only on the word of a generation with whose aesthetics we are in little sympathy, and their records, made in the twilight of their careers, show more effort than achievement. True, some of John's finest performances were never recorded; but students of singing in the future, turning back to account for an extraordinary reputation, will find plenty of material on which to base their judgment.

III

The first thing that will strike them is the voice itself. The earliest records, as we have seen, promise nothing extraordinary. They tell us nothing of the quality perceived at once by Vincent O'Brien and Dudley Forde. A light, pure tenor, thin at the top, does its best to be heard above a vigorous brass band accompaniment. The best of the Odeon records do the voice something like justice, but the singing is immature, and the accompaniments asthmatic and dolorous. It is to the records of the Victor Company and His Master's Voice that we must turn to hear the artist at his best.

John's voice was a pure tenor, of which the Irish colouring was strengthened by an Italian training. Keeping all the weather of its native skies, it achieved the brightness and ring of the best Italian voices, with none of their harshness. Rounded, steady, and true, it had the magical quality of being released rather than uttered. The voice exults in its own beauty: the singing is an expression of delight. Nothing can suggest its exuberance, its living beauty, but

images from its native air. It wells up with the dark fullness of a flooded river, leaping into sunlight, gleaming with an almost unbearable brilliance, then leaving a last soft note to float high in the air—like the coloured spray from a waterfall, a heavenly visitant rather than a ghost.

Our student, properly indifferent to anecdote and metaphor, will notice that the voice is not only perfectly rounded, but that it rings on every vowel with equal brightness. Listening to the record of '*Salve dimora*,' he will hardly believe it is sung in the original key, so easily are the notes taken, and so full the tone. When the climax comes, he will be astonished to hear the high C taken on the 'u' of *fanciulla*, as not one tenor in two hundred¹ could dream of taking it; and he will realize why the Gramophone Company put this record into their old celebrity series of *Faust* in preference to Caruso's, even though it broke the sequence: for Caruso sang the part in all the others, and they were all in French.

Returning for a moment to comparisons, we might liken the voice of the typical Italian tenor to a bright flat band of metal; of the English, to a wooden pipe, hollow at the centre; of the German, to a pipe of metal stuffed with felt. John's voice was rounded and all of a piece. It had no hollows to be stuffed with anything. Its tone was living, warm, and healthy. It had none of the whiteness that sometimes disfigured the noble eloquence of Bonci, none of the snarl that could tarnish the silver tones of Zenatello. At one period—to judge by certain of his records—it tended to be nasal; otherwise it had no physical flaw. Compared even to the voice of so excellent a lyric tenor as Evan Williams, his cousin in ease and Celtic softness, John's voice had an additional dimension.²

¹ The only other singer I have heard do this is Bonci.

² It is very interesting to compare records by John and Evan Williams of the same arias and songs. Excellent examples are '*Che gelida manina*' (the Welshman sings it in English) and Liddle's 'A Farewell.'

If the physical gift was outstanding, the control matched it. Perfect breathing gave John a freedom of phrase and a command of tone which none of his contemporaries could surpass. If the student doubt this, he has only to put on the record of '*Il mio tesoro*.' The long, ascending phrase in Handel's 'O Sleep, Why Dost Thou Leave Me?' would have been additional evidence, if we had the record; but, though the record was made in America, no copies seem to have survived. No singer I have ever heard phrased this as perfectly as did John; nor could any approach him in the difficult '*Una Ban*', as arranged by Hardebeck. I once asked John why he never recorded this.

'Ah,' he said, 'it's so difficult!'

It takes a real artist to make such an admission.

Both those songs, however, belong to a later period in his development as singer and musician. '*Il mio tesoro*' was recorded in 1910. It is sung with a peculiar innocence, almost as if a bird should sing it; but it is perfect Mozart singing. The voice is even and full, the runs would put many a soprano to shame, and the phrasing is all but unbelievable in its freedom.

One secret of perfect phrasing is to find the centre of gravity of each phrase. See the phrase as it is written on the music sheet. Think of the notes as points only, and draw a line joining the points together. The line will be a living thing, thicker and darker in some places, thin and light in others. Imagine that it is solid, a strip of metal, and lift it off the page. If it had to be balanced on the point of a pencil, where would the pencil point go? Not necessarily in the middle, for the darker, thicker parts will weigh heavier. The place, when found, on which the strip balances, will be the centre of gravity of the phrase: the point the singer instinctively has in mind when adjusting his breathing and control to sing the phrase.

I apologise for so odd an illustration; but I hammered it

out to meet a problem of my own, the singers and speakers on whom I have tried it out have at once understood it, and one teacher at least has adopted it. John, needless to say, saw it in a flash, and nearly nodded his big head off.

I was speaking of the innocence of his singing of Mozart. That quality of innocence was inherent in the voice, which never lost it. My wife described Caruso's as a double-bed voice. John's held no such suggestion. Like Synge's Christy Mahon, it was 'always the decent boy.' The invitation, meltingly given, 'Slip into my bosom' (from 'Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal') could be accepted by a maiden in the full confidence that 'None other shall share it, no one ever will' ('Mother Machree'). I have never heard the cry, '*O soave fanciulla*' from the first act of *La Bohème* so irresistibly sung as by John to the Mimi of Lucrezia Bori. The very outpouring of youthful ardour, it promised everything, for the first time and the last.

IV

I referred in an earlier chapter to the resemblance as artists between John and Kreisler. Both use a golden richness of tone; their phrasing is similar; and both, while capable of interpreting the highest of the classics, perform numbers which are popular in the broadest sense, and have no interest for the musician.

Why did John sing so much rubbish? How could a singer capable of the best in Handel and Mozart, in Brahms and Wolf, sing some of the things he sang with evident sincerity and enjoyment? Had he no real taste at all? Was he, musically speaking, an inspired simpleton?

John himself has rationalized the matter. To sing only the best music, he regards as a form of snobbery. In his recitals, he would sing first what he owed to music, then what he owed to his voice, then what he owed to his country, and finally what he owed to the less sophisticated of those who had paid to hear him. Many of these had no musical taste, but were capable of emotional response to songs of obvious and simple sentiment. Were they to be sent empty away?

Here are his own words on the subject.

'Singing is most of all an expression of something felt, rather than thought—though who can say where thought ends and feeling begins? Because they mean more to me, musically, I would rather sing songs like "*Die Mainacht*" or "*Du bist die Ruh*" than some of the more popular numbers that are always demanded of me. But I thank God that I can feel what the everyday man and woman feel with regard to the homely and healthy emotions which often are so simply and eloquently expressed by songs of lesser musical pretensions. I have never sung music I did not want to sing. I have my preferences, of course; and these are not always the same as the preferences of my audiences. I try to go half-and-half with them: I give them what they would not be happy without; and they, in turn, must take what I would not be happy if I did not sing. But sometimes—often, in fact—I find that a song I was not particularly enthusiastic about when I placed it on the programme—because I had grown a little tired of it—is the one I feel most deeply when the time comes to put it over.'

It is a reasoned answer, but I suspect that the real truth lies deeper. To each art belongs something which is peculiarly its own. A song may be musically valueless, yet contain something which excites a singer and gives scope for things his voice exults to do. Caruso and John once spent hours over a drawing-room ballad demanding an effect

which John could get and Caruso, for all his superb technique, could not.¹ The most commonplace ballad may enable a singer to do something which delights and moves to envy his brother singers, but says nothing to the critic in his stall. John's stunt B flats at the end of a composition entitled 'When My Ships Come Sailing Home' astound the student of singing, but the musician merely raises his eyebrows. In the same way, the flawless performance with Kreisler of Godard's '*Berceuse de Jocelyn*' will produce in the musician no reaction save regret that such voice and technique were not used upon better material.

But, with John, the question goes far beyond any desire to show what he can do. Possessed of an acute critical intelligence, with an intuitive understanding of great music, he has always been immediately accessible to simple emotions simply expressed. Ernest Newman has said that it was precisely because he could so subtly phrase a song of Schubert or Wolf that he was able to move a huge audience with a popular ballad. This is true, but it is only half the truth. John could not so have held the unsophisticated unless he were himself moved by what moved them. One side of his mind recognized the songs for what they were; but, once the first chord was struck, he gave himself up utterly to the emotion expressed or simulated in the words.

At one of his Albert Hall recitals in response to demands for yet another encore, John came on, smiling broadly. He said something to Edwin Schneider, his accompanist, glanced up at a box in which sat Backhaus and Mischa Elman, and shook with enormous irresistible laughter.

He composed himself, nodded, and Schneider played the opening bars of 'Love's Old Sweet Song'—to the usual burst of applause from that section of the audience which recognized a favourite. Smiling no longer, the tenor shut his eyes, and sang the song as if no one had ever sung it

¹ The echo effect in Bartlett's 'A Dream.'

before. Cleared of half a century's mishandling, it became a new thing; crude and naïf, but real.

The obvious explanation would seem to be that the singer was bamboozling his audience, parading his hold over the many to amuse the few. The truth was at once simpler and more complex. John knew well the audacity of singing such a song in such a place. He knew what musicians would think; yet he knew that, *as a singer*, he could mean what was in the notes and the words. There has always been something in him, below consciousness, which could catch the spirit of a song. It was almost a gift of trance. When he sang 'Take, Oh Take, Those Lips Away,' it was with an almost ghostly quality, so that a four-square Victorian setting floated back to the sixteenth century. This faculty allowed even the crudest song to mean to him all that it meant to the thousands who loved it. For the moment, music and words expressed not only themselves, but him. All that he was, all that he had seen and felt, went into that song, and without any diminution. It was the song that expanded. Needless to say, he could not in a poor song express so much as in a fine one; but he could transfigure the poor song, and that by more than the physical beauty of his voice.

John believed vocally in every song he sang; and that is what matters.

So, at his recitals, he would give a performance of some classical song, instinct with every touch of intellectual and sensuous musicianship; and then, in order to sing something which in itself could give a musician no pleasure, he would put off his years of sophistication, and, while his technique remained as scrupulous as ever, be once more the boy from Athlone to whom the song was beautiful. The tawdry words held magic for him, became the highest human expression of supreme emotions. It was, one must repeat, a gift of trance.

The trance could be broken, and self-consciousness could be roused so as to make its incidence unlikely. On one occasion Rachmaninov came into the room where John and Kreisler were practising intently a piece of unusual naïveté, which they proposed to record. He burst out laughing.

They stopped in protest.

'Serge—what is the matter?'

'It is so funny to see two serious musicians practising away solemnly at such rubbish.'

The two serious musicians began to laugh, and could never attempt the piece again.

But, as a rule, if John could once mean a song, he would not let himself be put off it. However he might joke about it off the platform, he could surrender to it again and again before an audience. It was a lucky faculty, for such an audience as his would have detected insincerity in an instant; but it was an integral part of his character, and of the more serious side of his character.

A Count of the Holy Roman Empire, John, as will be clear long before this, has always been strongly religious. The faith of a devout Catholic is not affected by inadequate words, any more than by tawdry religious images of the kind exhibited in cheap shop windows. Where the fundamental truth lies beyond human expression, he knows better than to be put off by childish and inadequate symbols. He accepts them because of what they represent, and because of what they mean to simple people.

This circumstance may well have helped him to tolerate banal words and music because of the emotion they sought to express, and for the sake of the people whom he could move so deeply when he sang them. I am not concerned to defend his choice of songs, but to account for the fact

that he sang them: to account for the fact that a man of highly sophisticated musical intelligence (and no one could talk to him for five minutes without becoming aware of that) should, without detriment to his serious work, have sung in complete sincerity a mass of commonplace; appealing, as did Kreisler, to listeners on every rung of the musical ladder.

VI

The strength of his religious belief was a real factor in John's singing. Sitting close to him at a recital, I remember, in the pianoforte prelude to César Franck's '*La Procession*', seeing his face drawn with emotion and his lips murmur in prayer. The song treats of holy things, so, for the moment, the singer's art held an extra significance. Unaided, he could not give more than the best he gave to every song. If more virtue came, it could come only from outside.

There was more in this than the gesture of the boxer who crosses himself before he leaves his corner. The medieval craftsman glorified his God in all he did, and John has much in common with him; but, in songs like '*La Procession*', he was the mouthpiece of the greatest truth he knew.

From the middle years of his career, he invariably gave a place to sacred songs in his recitals.

'I have made it a rule,' he told a correspondent, 'to have on my programme at least one song in which I pour forth my thanks to God or sing His glory.'

That the song should not always be of musical value was not surprising.

During the Great War, the Victor Company in America asked John to make a record of 'Onward Christian

Soldiers.' He consented, but, when the record was played, they found he had put a special emphasis on the lines

We have Christ's own promise
And that cannot fail—

and turned the Evangelical war-cry into a Catholic hymn. Perhaps as a result, the record was never released.

VII

Despite his power of getting to the heart of a song, and the many types of music he could sing, John's voice and style were unmistakable. Even in concerted work, he could not remain anonymous for two bars. The physical vitality of the voice, its magic blend of sparkle and plangency, proclaimed him at once. Even the early Odeon records could not be anyone else's.

And there were other characteristics. For one thing, he never sang in English. Not only did he keep his brogue, but he approached the English language from a foreign standpoint. An Irishman's vowels are open. He does not say 'hay' or 'day,' closed at the end, as an Englishman does. He says hé (heh) and dé. His o's are the open continental 'oa,' not the closed English 'o-oo.' He lengthens the 'oo' of book and cook. He sounds all his consonants, and tends, like a Frenchman, to begin each syllable with a consonant instead of with a vowel. 'Denounce,' for instance, which an Englishman sings as 'den-ounce,' an Irishman calls 'deenounce.' And so on and so forth.

The Irish boy from Athlone took his brogue to Milan and found there practically the same vowels and the same insistence on the consonant. (One can hear every syllable a good Italian tenor utters, even though one may not know what the separate words are. Add to this a capacity for resonance on every vowel—the last thing an English singer

can manage—and you have an equipment that is going to make the English tongue sound strange indeed.

It was, of course, perfect for an Irish song—‘Whenn furrst uy saa sweet Pegee, ’twas anna marrkut deh’: but in songs of English genius, it sounded odd indeed.

Sinnce furrst uy saa yoor féss, uy ree-sallved
Too anner aand ree-nownn yoo.

The contrast between the two methods can be clearly shown by a couple of lines from *The Princess*:

She went to the village church,
And sat by a pillar alone.

The typical English tenor sings:

She went to the village chahch,
And sett by a pillah aleone.

The typical Irish:

She wenntt ta tha villadge churrcb,
And satt buy a pillur—ALOAN.

There is no question which is the better as English, but the second is apt to make for better *physical* singing.

John, approaching English from the Irish-Italian angle, produced not only vital differences in verbal sound, but differences in flow of tone and continuity of phrasing. Giving each vowel and consonant full (from the English point of view, excessive) value, and exaggerating the smaller vowels, he was able to let his tone flow more evenly than can the English singer. He had no bother about closing vowels. His ‘o’ could ring untrammelled, the little word ‘away’ became ‘aa-weh’ if the musical line called for it, the indefinite article could be lengthened to ‘aa’ or ‘aaa’ (all Irish singers do this). ‘Earth’ was, not ‘urth,’ but ‘airth.’ Try them both in the upper part of your voice, and you will soon see which is easier. Any telling consonant

could be seized on at will for an accent which flipped tone and phrase on their ever-forward course. From the conventional point of view, John flagrantly misused the English language; but, experiencing none of the difficulties which beset the English singer,¹ he maintained a singularly beautiful vocal line.

This Italo-Hibernian fluency gave to his singing of English an exotic and caressing quality which told heavily in favour of love song and drawing-room ballad. His rendering of Liza Lehmann's 'Ah! Moon of My Delight' will not be surpassed. The nostalgic softness of the Irish voice, the smooth seductive flow, and the last miraculously sustained *pianissimo*, express perfectly the languorous pessimism of words and music. Those high *pianissimo* notes were a speciality of John's. At one time he grew too fond of them, especially in the more insignificant portions of his repertoire, where they embellished many a ditty in sad need of embellishment. But they were always legitimate singing, always fully supported. From the high soft B natural that opens the last phrase of Rachmaninov's 'How Fair This Spot,' the voice swells to *forte* without camouflage or transition. And, in their place, how beautiful they were: at the close of Tosti's '*Ideale*'; on the last vanishing syllable of 'Take, Oh Take, Those Lips Away'; for the final invocation of 'The Snowy Breasted Pearl'; and, flicking up, irresponsible and heartless, at the end of 'The Short Cut to the Rosses.'

VIII

In Irish songs of all kinds John was supreme. He has the Irish temperament in full measure, and he brought to music that was in his blood a technique that gave it perfect

¹ He maintains that the difficulties English singers find in singing their own language are due to faulty training.



JOHN MC CORMACK AND HIS PORTRAIT BY SIR WILLIAM ORPEN
THE ARTIST IS ON THE RIGHT

utterance. His singing of patter songs and ballads was as consummate as his graceful and sensuous *legato* in Moore. The humour, the sense of character, the trip-hammer enunciation, the instant response to emotion that realized themselves in 'The Low-backed Car' or 'The Garden where the Praties Grow' could change at once to the curving self-pity of 'Has Summer Thy Young Days Shaded' or 'The Fanaid Grove.' The diction never slackened: John knew the value of consonants in *legato* phrasing; but the very spirit that Moore, for good or bad, breathed into his melodies, found consummation in John's singing.

The pity is that so few of them survive on records. His singing of 'The Meeting of the Waters' is lost; so are 'Oft in the Stilly Night'¹ and 'The Last Rose of Summer.' Still, there are several left. Of some, the earlier renderings have been replaced with electric recordings made when the voice was past its prime. Electric recording never suited John, and it is to be hoped that the Gramophone Company will revive some of those earlier performances for their excellent Historical Series.

Towards the end of his concert career, John's voice changed somewhat in character, taking on more of a baritone tinge. The high soft notes would not always come when they were called, and he had to readjust his technique in consequence. This he did with the greatest skill. The handicap was soon turned to an asset, and in his last few years he sang as never before; but the old magnificent freedom had gone.

IX

If I had to prescribe for some future student, or for anyone who wants to know what manner of singer John

¹ Since I wrote this John has re-recorded the first two, and I have found the Odeon record of 'Oft in the Stilly Night.'

McCormack was, I should commend him to the following list of records, all His Master's Voice.

OPERA

'Don Giovanni.' Mozart. *Il mio tesoro.*

'Faust.' Gounod. *Salve dimora casta e pura.*

'Carmen.' Bizet. *Il fior che avevi a me tu dato.*

'Pescatori di Perle.' Bizet. *Mi par d'udir ancora.*

LIEDER

*'Ganymede.' Wolf.

*'Schlafendes Jesuskind.' Wolf. (The earlier recording, with piano, in preference to orchestral accompaniment.)

*'Where'er You Walk.' Handel.

'To the Children' (with Kreisler). Rachmaninov.

IRISH

'I Saw from the Beach' (with Kreisler). Moore, arr. Herbert Hughes.

'Molly Brannigan,' arr. Fox.

*'The Garden where the Praties Grow,' arr. Liddle.

'The Star of the County Down,' arr. Herbert Hughes (a miracle of subtle rhythmic variation).

MISCELLANEOUS

'Ah! Moon of My Delight.' Lehmann.

*'When My Ships Come Sailing Home.' Dorel. (Purely for the amazing stunt singing at the end.)

*'The Fairy Tree.'

'Angels Guard Thee' (with Kreisler). Godard.

*'The Kerry Dance.' Molloy. (John says, 'I hate this record!')

'I Hear You Calling Me.' Marshall. (The old recording, with orchestra.)

'The Trumpeter.' Dix. (A surprisingly dramatic and robust rendering of a ballad normally reserved for basses and baritones.)

With the caution that the records marked * belonged to the singer's later period, the student will have solid ground on which to base his judgment. He will have a clue to the affection in which John was held. He will understand the fanatical devotion to him of his own countrymen. And, from the Mozart record alone, he will realize that, although John could pack the Albert Hall and often sang nonsense, he had an impeccable technique, and knew how to use it.

A caution is needed in the case of the German *lieder*. Many of them John sings beautifully, but his German is Italianized. There is too much emphasis on the consonants, and the singing is too forward in tone to be characteristic of the language. But his Wolf records, his '*Waldeseinsamkeit*' of Brahms, his '*Morgen*' of Strauss, make such defects of very little moment. The end of the Brahms song—'*Ferne, ferne, ferne sang eine Nachtigall*'—is unforgettable. The colour of the first 'a' of *Nachtigall* takes away the breath.

But the records cannot do everything. There remain the memories of the living singer which may not outlive those who heard and saw him.

I shall not forget his singing of 'She Moved through the Fair,' with the shiver of its ending as the ghost whispers again the old dead words of promise; nor the last sad cry from Schubert's '*Der Jungling an die Quelle*': the passionate declamation of '*Una Ban*', the twilit beauty of 'My Lagan Love'—a beauty at once homely and unearthly—matching the lonely exultation of the old Scots lament, 'Turn Ye to Me.'

This last the student of records can share, as he can one of the loveliest single phrases—'*Es ist Anakreons Rub*'; no other singer I have heard has achieved in this the same significance and the same simplicity. To these and many another are added some few behind the scenes: John sitting upright on a sofa, illustrating with voice and gesture the

accompaniment to Stanford's 'Lament for Owen Roe O'Neill' so perfectly that one realized the song for the first time, saw, as in a lightning flash, the rain-swept hillside and heard the drums; John championing vigorously to Gerald Moore the songs of Hubert Parry; John demonstrating at the piano the indebtedness of a popular pseudo-Irish song to a movement from a Brahms symphony; John in wickedly brilliant imitation of a colleague, perfect to the last gesture of galvanized brightness: there are many memories, and they will not wear out.

x

The consensus of critical opinion on John's achievement, apart from the bewilderment of certain musicians at the nonsense included in his programmes, has been definite and clear. After all reservations have been made, they have granted him to be the best endowed lyric tenor of his time, a master of phrasing and diction, and without peer in singing the songs of his own country.

The many attempts that were made at a final assessment after his retirement, emphasized these qualities. Little would be gained by printing quotations from them here. In the long run it is not the opinions of critics that decide a singer's fame. It is the legend that grows up round him. To this legend the opinions contribute, but they do not create it. For proof of this one has only to look at the press notices of a legion of singers enthusiastically hailed in their own generation, but now unremembered.

John is a ready subject for legend, and legend assuredly will grow around him. The poor boy with nothing but his voice, who made fame and fortune and conquered the

world; that gives the legend a good start. Strongest of all is the amazing emotional hold which that voice had over all who fell under its spell. No other singer of his time had this power over an audience, this power to touch the heart. Other singers caused excitement, frenzy, admiration, wonder, but none had the same call on the deepest and simplest feelings of ordinary people. There was in the voice something which seemed to them an intimation of another world.

On a colder, more technical level, singers and teachers of singing appraised the voice no less enthusiastically. Singers are in the habit of complimenting one another, but what they say or set down in moments of professional sobriety is worth listening to. Caruso had the highest opinion both of John's voice and of the way he used it. When, after Caruso's death, John was hailed as the world's greatest tenor, and smilingly denied the compliment, Caruso's wife confirmed it.

Madame Schumann-Heink maintained on many occasions that John was the greatest singer of his time. She spoke of his production, his breath control, the instinctive perfection of his tone colouring, his ease and spontaneity, and his unrivalled power of telling a story in song.

Madame Blanche Marchesi, who was hard to please and sparing of her praises, described Bonci and John as Caruso's superiors in phrasing and refinement of style. Chaliapin, who cared for few tenors, spoke of John with a kind of startled admiration. Destinn called him incomparable. It is an out-worn adjective, but none will do better.

CHAPTER 13

THE WAR YEARS form a chapter in John's life which he would wish cut short. He shall have his wish.

The wish is dictated by no desire to conceal anything, but by memories of pain and misunderstanding. The facts are plain. As soon as he could, John returned to America in fulfilment of his contract. All his income, all his prospects, all his future lay there rather than in England. It became increasingly difficult to be a citizen of one country and to live and earn his living in another. Accordingly, he declared his intention of becoming an American citizen.

This was regarded by many people as an act of desertion, and he heard himself denounced both here and throughout the British Empire as a renegade, whose only motive had been to escape military service.

Before going any further, I should make clear that I write as an Anglo-Irishman, born, educated, and living in England, whose loyalty to England has never caused him a moment's misgiving or uncertainty. I have always known exactly where my own duties lie, and my inclinations lie there too. But I can see more than one side to this Irish-English, English-Irish question, and I have never pretended not to.

It has always astonished me that England, whose past dealings with Ireland are, to say the least, open to criticism, should expect all Irishmen automatically to support her in whatever she does. A great proportion do so support her.

The army, the navy, the air force contain Irishmen in high ratio to the tiny population of their country; and these are backed by many active sympathizers at home. But England appears at best to take this fact for granted, and in times of greater difficulty to ignore it. The Irishmen who put bombs in cloakrooms attract far more attention, and seem to be regarded as far more typical of their country, than those who labour upon England's errands. It is a pity, if only because it tends to keep alive the difficulties between the two countries.

These difficulties cut both ways. One result of them is that many Irish people regard America as a more natural home for them than England. It is to America that they turn when their own country can no longer support them, for reasons which they may have been taught, however wrongly, to lay at England's door. John, an Irishman, found himself bound by business contracts to work the greater part of the year in a country which not only made him welcome but offered him ten times more than England. He accepted the welcome and the offer, and he stayed. Although there were Englishmen who remained in America to fulfil their business contracts, they were forgiven. The Irishman was not.

And, because any stick is good enough to beat a dog, all manner of lies grew up around the truth. It was a deep comfort to John at this time to receive a letter from Kreisler. Kreisler had served in the Austrian Army and, being wounded, was packed off to safety by a people which had not wished him to jeopardize himself in the first place. He, too, was the subject of attack, and had the strength of character to meet it.

'When truth is no longer possible between man and man,' he wrote to John, 'rumour comes into its own. We have to suffer it.'

With the entry of America into the war, John's position

at once became easier. Having declared his intention to become an American citizen, John became automatically liable for military service. He did not claim exemption.

But the Americans are realistic about this kind of thing. They realized that John could be put to better national use than as a soldier or a cook. He was urged to claim exemption, but still refused. His case came into court, and the perplexed judge found the way out of the difficulty. He sent for Lily, and asked her if it was true that John was her sole means of support. Lily admitted this.

The judge sat back in his chair.

'Thank God,' he exclaimed fervently. 'I did not want to be lynched for sending John McCormack into the army.'

John at once went to John Ryan, President of the Anaconda Copper Company, and Vice-President of the American Red Cross.

'I will give you fifty thousand dollars a year,' he said, 'or I'll do a tour from New York to Los Angeles and back, whichever you prefer.'

Ryan smiled. 'I can get all the dollars I want,' he said, 'but I can't get the sort of propaganda that would be. I'll take the tour.'

And he placed his private car at John's service from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Accordingly, throughout the war, John sang for the Red Cross, earning enormous sums of money, and so was enabled to make a contribution of solid and practical value. So conspicuous were his services that he received a special certificate of thanks from President Wilson. His adopted countrymen at least were satisfied with the part he had played.

One word more. The French people have no reputation for tolerance to the *embusqué* or the shirker. It is clear that, whatever certain people may have thought in Eng-

land, the French did not so regard John. If they had so regarded him, he would not have been invited to sing by Foch, nor would he have been made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur.

CHAPTER 14

HITHERTO, AS MUST have been apparent to the reader, John was a young man whose character had few complications. The story of the early years shows a nature likeable, generous, impulsive, naïf but shrewd; a strong character with an amiable weakness or two, a driving ambition modified by diffidence and regard for the feelings of others; a nature candid and trustful, with unexpectedly deep reserves, and a strong, uncomplicated religious sense.

I have said nothing yet—and readers must have marked the omission—about the most interesting and important aspect of John's leap into fame and money; and that is, how he took it. What effect had sudden wealth upon his character?

The answer is, very little. It gave him a sense of power, against which his simplicity protected him. No one who has been poor and has had to put up with indifferent or cruel treatment can resist a satisfaction at being able to say, 'Now, you so-and-so's; but men of John's temperament are always more given to the direct enjoyment of their good fortune than to resentments and the paying off of scores. John could nourish a grudge against a man until he met him again. Then, if the man were friendly, the grudge would speedily melt; and John would afterwards curse himself for a weak-minded fool, trying hard to keep up his grudge, and failing. A really generous temperament cannot be forced against its grain.

When one considers the severity of his first struggles,

the suddenness and completeness of his success, and all the dangers such success brings to temperament as well as character, one must admit that the boy from Athlone comes through very well. The test he had next to face was sterner; he did not get through unscathed. The years 1914–18 left an indelible mark upon his character.

To a friendly nature like John's it is almost unbearable to feel that one is disliked. A bad notice hurts and bewilders him because it seems an evidence of hostility he cannot have deserved. 1914–18 taught him more than dozens of bad notices. To be assailed and hurt, when he was naturally peace-loving and easy-going; to have to justify himself, when all he had thought of was to be let go his way unmolested; to have what appeared to him the right and obvious course attacked as base; to see himself and his motives described in terms he would use only for what he detested; these were experiences calculated to modify any simplicity and trust and candour. They modified John's; yet nine-tenths of what I have written above is true of him to-day.

What the four years did was not all harm. They toughened the man, they hardened him, they drove him to rely more strongly on inner sanctions. But the John of 1918 was warier, coarser, more worldly-wise than the John of 1914. There was a new suspicion behind the eyes, the suspicion of a man who has been hurt and takes care not to uncover himself. Because such caution was foreign to him, for a while John suffered badly. He was able presently to open up again and to be his old self, but the scars remained. Even to-day, old campaigner though he is, he can be readily hurt, and he shrinks instantly at any note of reserve or lack of enthusiasm in those he is with. He is afraid of exposing himself and being misunderstood for his pains; and because he is irremediably open and direct, because he cannot help exposing himself, he is quick at self-mockery before the enemy can thrust at him.

To a declared enemy he is formidable and tremendous. He has been hit hard himself, and he knows how to hit back.

Those four years did something to him of which he will always be the better. They showed a man who in many ways was little more than a child that actions which to him were natural and unquestioned could appear unrecognizably different to others. This drove him back upon his central diffidence; but his success came to the rescue. He leaned on it, and learned from it. It taught him to stand alone. And, the moment he learned this, he was able to see how many others had learned it too, and to draw strength from them. Whenever his voice admitted him to their company, his character, toughened under duress, won him their deeper recognition. The John of to-day has met too many of the world's great men not to know who he is and what he is. Those four years were a necessary stage in his growth for bringing the first shadow of adversity upon a career that, its early struggles apart, had been all sunshine. He emerged from the ordeal a better artist.

That, maybe, is the most important point. A great talent attracts the experience it needs for its development. John's singing after 1918 had matured and developed out of all proportion to its rate of development before.

It is a common error to treat artists as if their art were all that mattered, and the joys and sorrows of their lives were so much fodder for it. Yet, again and again, the lives of artists reveal an extraordinary power to profit artistically from experience. In the case of a great artist, there is no paradox. The art is an expression of the whole personality, which in its turn is moulded and developed by the experience. What matters is that the experience be genuine, be deeply suffered, and come unsought. It is worse than useless for the artist to chase experience. He can only profit by what comes to him because he is the man he is.

John's experience in those four years came to him because he was the man he was. His task was to benefit from it.

II

The experience was not, of course, confined to inner stress resulting from criticism and hostility. There were the tours themselves, with huge audiences roused to an enthusiasm which was almost frightening; and there were the personalities with which the tours brought him into contact. An artist of celebrity can meet almost anyone he wants to. Those who rise to the top in one profession will sooner or later bump into those who rise to the top in others. Yet the mere fact of being an artist can impose a limitation. In the ordinary course of his work, there are important individuals whom the artist as such is unlikely to meet—heads of departments, persons behind the scenes in politics, military executives, members of that large and indeterminate class whom a war calls into extra activity, and upon whom it confers special importance. Now that his art was harnessed to the war effort, John met men of whose existence he would ordinarily not have known. And they, who would never have paid attention to the most exalted of tenors, found time to look with approval upon the man whose efforts were bringing in such solid and tangible results.

It was a curious and valuable addition to the wide acquaintance procured through the freemasonry of success. The benefit which it brought is easier to understand than to describe. What the freemasonry of success brings is immensely stimulating, but can be dangerous. No man can approach mastery in one art or profession without

gaining some measure of understanding of the rest. At the least, he will have an immediate intuition of mastery in someone else. He will know at a glance whether the painter or pianist or surgeon or advocate is a master of his craft. He will also be able to follow intelligently the technique of that craft.

For instance, John, though he will sing with conviction the most banal and fatuous of lyrics once it is set to music, has an excellent sense of words and is an acute judge of writing. When he writes himself he is inclined to rhetoric, and very good rhetoric it can be. But that does not prevent him from judging writing of a very different kind, and from detecting mercilessly repetition and tautology. I wish I could have reproduced his comments on the rough draft of this manuscript. Unfortunately he would not give me leave to do so, as they were expressed often in terms of unseemly vigour. I can best sum up by saying that they were forcible, constructive, and, nine times out of ten, dead right.

To return to the meetings which his war work brought. These meetings were salutary, because the persons concerned lay wholly outside the orbit of his ordinary work and its contacts. He met and was appraised by men with shrewd, hard minds who knew nothing of singing and cared less. The reputation of any artist meant less to them than a box of matches. It lay as far outside their interests as the remoter facts of entomology or botany. John found himself, if anything, suspect, a strange animal. He would be treated with guarded respect as an ally, and his reception would depend entirely upon his human value and the degree to which he delivered the goods.

John emerged creditably from both tests. What the success did to him I cannot, as I said, describe. I can only guess at it from experiences of my own on a very much smaller scale. In the spring of 1939, I was asked, with a

number of others, to speak at recruiting rallies for the Ministry of Labour. Usually I speak only on matters connected with books and writing to audiences who have come to hear about such matters. Instead, I found myself in drill halls, on platforms decorated with Union Jacks, surrounded by provincial mayors and army officers, suspect, a strange animal, confronting audiences who had not come to hear a novelist and broadcaster discourse, but were agglomerations of all types, and had to be made to listen.

If one emerges from such a test undamaged, and notes a change in the attitude of the military gentlemen and the provincial mayors, etc., something happens which is hard to describe, but which in the long run does a man good. It happened to John very often, and on a very large scale.

III

John was lucky personally throughout the war to lose none of his immediate circle of relatives and friends. The nearest loss fell to Lily. Thomas Foley, who was an official of the Dublin Corporation, was crossing with his wife to Holyhead by the mail-boat *Leinster* on the morning of the 10th October 1918. They were going to the death-bed of a relative in England. They never got there, for the *Leinster* was torpedoed, and went down a few miles from the Irish coast, taking the Foleys with her.

The worst feature of their death was that they had a family of ten children, for whom no provision was left. Here was something John could do, and did. He took responsibility for the ten, made himself their second father, brought them up, educated them, and launched them in the world.

It was a characteristic action for which he would no more take credit than he would for washing his hands before a meal.

IV

During the last months of the war, John received several letters from a sergeant in the American Army. The sergeant had written first of all as an admirer, and, when John replied, he wrote again. The two exchanged letters at intervals; then the correspondence ceased, and John heard no more of his friend until one day he saw his name in the paper.

The sergeant had come in one day to find his wife with another man, and had shot them both dead. It was a case where the unwritten law held good, and there was no death penalty.

Not all John's memories of these years are sombre. The contacts had their humorous side. Immediately the war was ended, John was one day introduced to the combined Senate and Congress of the State of Minnesota. The Governor of the State, whose name proclaimed him of Scandinavian origin, gave a long and enthusiastic speech of praise, towards the end of which he suddenly turned to John and enquired in an undertone,

'What was the name, please?'

The war also provided one of the best excuses for a singer he ever heard. One of Melba's protégés, who succeeded John, was the tenor, Guido Ciccolini. To be picked out by Melba was a sufficient tribute to voice and ability, so that the incident which follows can be told without unfairness. After a concert at which John had heard him sing, Ciccolini came to him.

'How did I sing, Giovanni?' he asked anxiously. 'Well?'
'Not as well as usual, Guido. You sang off the key.'
Ciccolini spread out his hands.

'How can I not sing off the key,' he exclaimed, 'when I have two brothers fighting for Italy?'

It is pleasant to record, after so charming an excuse, that Ciccolini did very well in America, and presently attracted world-wide attention when he was chosen to sing at the funeral service of Rudolph Valentino. Obviously, the error was not habitual.

v

The end of the war found John in a mood of strength and enterprise. He had seen a good deal of Kreisler, and the two had made many records together. This, coupled with the experiences he had been through, urged him to extend his repertoire in new directions. War-time had loosened musical standards among audiences, and John, in the full glory of his voice, had done more stunt singing than was good for his soul. He now turned his mind in the direction of classical *lieder*, and with characteristic thoroughness set about qualifying himself to sing them.

It was a bold subject for one whose whole training had been Italian and whose leaning was towards folk-music and the ballad. John had practically given up opera. Not only was the concert platform more remunerative, but it fitted better with his temperament and was far better for his voice. In spite of his operatic successes, he felt always that his voice was on the light side, and he had many an object-lesson round him of the way in which the voices of opera singers wore out before their time.

A strong influence which helped him to make the change was the work of Ernest Newman. Newman's writing on Hugo Wolf not only inspired John with ambition to sing Wolf's songs, but pointed out a way of study. The experience and musicianship of Edwin Schneider did the rest.

The excursion into *lieder* was made at just the right time. The voice, if it had lost something of its lyric freshness, was exquisitely shaded, and more expressive than ever. The breath control was perfect, allowing for miracles of phrasing; and the musical intelligence, while more sophisticated, had still that almost mediumistic quality which enabled the singer to surrender to the song and yet keep his own individuality. John's singing of Brahms and Schubert and Wolf is not like a German's singing of them, but there is a real fusion between the singer and the song, and the extraordinary evocative power of the voice calls up something which, even though it be not native to the Black Forest or the Rhine, is very far from Italy and the Shannon.

Anyone with half an ear can tell the difference between the records John made just after the war and those he made before it; and it is not fanciful to relate that difference to the things that had been happening to the man.

VI

A pleasant interlude occurred in the summer of 1921. Cyril was at Canterbury School, New Milford. The school's Comedy Club put on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Cyril, who inherited a measure of his father's gifts, was cast as Oberon. On the strength of this, the school authorities approached Cyril's illustrious father, and the illustrious father graciously consented to sing in the incidental music. He sang 'I Know a Bank' to the Mendelssohn Song With-



WITH HIS MOTHER AND FATHER, HANNAH AND ANDREW MC CORMACK,
AT GREYSTONES, NEAR DUBLIN, 1925

out Words in E Major, and wound up the proceedings with a group of Shakespeare songs.

It was a great occasion for Cyril, who gained much in prestige. To produce one's parent at school is always an anxious business, but he found his father an asset.

VII

When the war was over, the natural question arose as to when John should come home. For the first years, contracts kept him in America. He was working hard, wishing, when he first sang again in London and Dublin, to present this new range of his work in its maturity.

In 1921 he went on a tour of Australia, and found that in some places his record in the war was not thought satisfactory. Letters to his friends in England, asking how the position stood, suggested that there might still be some hostility to him as a result of his change of citizenship. Actually, he had not become an American citizen till after the war, in 1919. But that made no difference. It would be advisable, the general opinion ran, to wait a year or so and allow feelings to settle down. All things considered, John and his advisers thought it would be possible to make his bow to the English public in the summer of 1922.

Then something happened which upset all his plans, and for a few days looked like upsetting them for ever. In April 1922 he fell seriously ill, and for some days his life was in danger.

He was due to sing at a concert one evening, and the day before woke up with a sore throat. He went straight off to see his throat specialist, Doctor Harman Smith, who found a white spot on one of his tonsils. Doctor Smith

treated this, but the trouble spread, and soon the tenor was down with a streptococcal infection of both tonsils.

The infection became acute, and soon it was known that he would be lucky to recover. If there had been any need to find out how well beloved he was by the American public, the evidence came now. At theatres and concert halls throughout the country, audiences stood for a minute of silent prayer for his recovery.

Instead of recovering, he grew worse. On Good Friday his condition was so bad that behind the screen in his bedroom were all the instruments for a tracheotomy. Then, on that day of all days, when he was busiest, Archbishop Hayes came to call upon the sick man. He said the prayers for the sick, blessed John, and gave him his own fragment of the True Cross.

That night Gwen had been taken to the opera by the soprano Frances Alda. Coming out after the performance, she was horrified to see on the newspaper posters that her father was dead. Alda brought her home grief-stricken to find that that very evening John had turned the corner.

'Sceptics may call it coincidence,' he said grimly. 'Let them.'

Once the danger was past, his naturally strong constitution came to his help and he recovered so quickly that in a month he was able to sail for England on the *Aquitania*. As soon as he arrived in London, he consulted a famous throat specialist, who assured him that the precious cords had suffered no damage. At the same time, the specialist would not hear of his attempting to give any recitals for several months. Rest was prescribed, and plenty of it.

John took the advice. It was not humanly possible for him to keep from singing altogether. The family were staying in Miss Mary Scott's house at Stow-on-the-Wold. He coaxed his voice along, and found that it was in good order. Mary Anderson at Broadway was a near neighbour, and

the McCormacks were often with her. An extra joy of these visits was the presence of Lionel Tertis, who for years had held an unchallenged position as Britain's leading viola player. The pair discovered a great affinity between the tenor fiddle and the tenor voice. Tertis introduced John to a number of old English arrangements for viola and voice, which they practised together, and which roused John to great enthusiasm. He planned to get Tertis to join him in some of his programmes, but for various reasons the plan never materialized.

Another meeting this summer was of importance not only to John but to Irish music. Herbert Hughes was at that time musical critic of the *Daily Telegraph*. John met him through Robin Legge, and, finding a fellow-enthusiast for Irish folk-music, encouraged Hughes to add to the settings he had begun to make of Irish airs. These settings were soon to become a feature in all John's programmes. When presently Hughes came to America to write a series of articles, John introduced four of his settings into a recital, with the composer at the piano. This concert did a great deal for Hughes's reputation in America; but he was so nervous that John had doubts whether they would get him on to the platform at all.

When the ordeal was over, Hughes mopped his forehead.

'I will never write a rude word about an accompanist again,' he said ruefully.

VIII

The visit to England was a great stimulus in every way. Cyril and Gwen were left there to go to school, John and Lily promising to return and spend Christmas with them.

There had been, too, the joy of meeting numbers of old friends. Many were dead. There was no Sir John Murray Scott; he had dropped dead years before, in the foyer of the house he gave to the nation, the home of the Wallace collection; but Miss Mary Scott extended welcome enough for both. Daddy Harrison had gone, and many another, but there were plenty to welcome John back and to reassure him about singing again in England. The best reassurance of all came from Clara Butt, whose heart was as big as her voice.

'If they talk of making a fuss when you go on the platform, John,' she declared, 'I will take your hand and walk on it with you. Then we will see what they do.'

And Kennerley Rumford, English of the English, swore the same.

So John went back with Lily, restored in health, heartened, and taking new songs with which to refresh his programmes. Some of them were Russian, and for a while he entertained the notion of learning that language in order to sing them. In the end, however, discretion prevailed, and he sang them in English.

On the voyage he tried his voice at the ship's concert, and an excited audience found it unimpaired.

But the real test was to come. Was his health sufficiently restored, and would his voice stand a full-length recital? There was only one way to find out.

The first concert was announced, and an immense audience came to hear it—an audience which realized that the occasion was critical for the singer and for themselves. When John walked on to the platform there was a loud burst of welcoming applause, cut suddenly short. A common impulse of anxiety urged the audience to find out at once how things stood. And John, always sensitive to the mood of an audience, and keyed up already with the knowledge that he had to re-establish himself—had almost

to begin all over again—felt the anxiety of the audience as an added challenge.

In a dead silence, he stood for a moment as if to collect his powers. The audience noted that he was thinner than before and somewhat pale. Then he nodded to Edwin Schneider, and, his voice calm and unshaken, sang the exquisite opening phrase of Handel's 'O Sleep, Why Dost Thou Leave Me?'

It was a mark of characteristic audacity to begin his first recital with an air calling for every resource of musicianship and voice. He sang it perfectly. Only those who knew him best could realize that he was holding himself in a little, using his voice with something less than its full freedom.

When the aria was finished, the audience broke into uproarious delight. Their fears had been needless; the voice was unharmed. A slight difference of quality, a darker tone in the middle of the voice, a hint of the baritone in the lower register—if these were results of the illness, they did no harm. From this point on, those who heard John noted a new power in his voice, a greater capacity for dramatic singing. The almost disembodied quality it had held in his first years was fading. A mature man was singing now, a man who knew the rough side of life as well as the smooth, a man who could sing of grief and danger and loss as one who had felt them, and not merely heard them as news from others.

Other recitals followed, and it was clear that John's position in the hearts of the American concert-going public was as strong as ever.

ix

On December the 15th, the day before he was due to return with Lily to England for the children's holidays,

John was honoured by a reception given to him by the Catholic Club of New York. Archbishop Hayes came to praise the guest of the evening, and welcomed him whole-heartedly as an artist, as a true lover of Ireland, and as a sincere and devoted son of Mother Church. The musical profession was represented by Marian Telva, of the Metropolitan Opera, who acknowledged John's position as a singer by making a deep curtsey to him when she came on to the platform to sing; by that excellent baritone, Reinald Werrenrath, who sang with John on many occasions, and collaborated with him on records; and by John's old friend the 'cellist, Joseph Hollman. Needless to say, John had to sing himself. He also made a speech, which is worth printing in full for the light it sheds upon the speaker.

'I am deeply sensitive of the great honour paid me by this splendid body of my co-religionists,' he said. 'I feel to-night as if I were being initiated into some secret order. In fact I know I am being initiated into the only secret order whose secrets are known to the whole wide world, the secret order of friends, that order which meets in the open, in the full glare of electric light, with no oaths of secrecy, no misuse of our flag, and animated by the love of Him whose symbol is a flaming cross, to do honour as they see fit to the most unworthy of the clan, and mark you I spell it with a C.'

'To be singled out by this splendid body of representative Catholics for such an honour makes me very proud. I wonder if all the members of the Catholic Club really appreciate what this club means. I have always felt that in times of stress and difficulties, such in fact as we are now passing through, there should be in the city of New York an organization which could speak as representing the Catholic laity of the city, always under the guidance of our beloved Archbishop. Of course, the Knights of Columbus is a wonderful organization, and I am very proud to be a knight, but that is a national organization. I think we need a civic organization. It ought, therefore, to be the duty of every member of the Catholic Club to boost the club and to work to the end that the Catholic Club become such a vital force that in all things

that come up where the opinion of the Catholic laymen of the city was required the Catholic Club would act as our spokesman.

'It is entirely up to the members of the club to make this organization the representative body of Catholic thought and activity. This cannot be done by talking, I admit. But it can be done by showing that a man is the better Catholic for being a member of the club.

'I have seen a Catholic stand in front of the Cathedral with his hat in his hand talking to a pretty girl, and the same man when passing the sacred edifice pulls his hat a little further on to his head. You know the gesture. I would like to think that being a member of the Catholic Club would make a man always remember the respect that is due to the house of God. It may be a small thing to harp on, but you see being a musician and an Irishman I like harps. And then again it is much more dignified to try to make America Catholic by force of good example than to go round the city shouting to every friend in sight "Hello, Mac."

'I believe we should at all times be proud to own we are Catholics, in fact, be a little more the militant type of Catholic, and show by our dealing with our fellow-men and by the cleanliness of our lives in every phase that we are the type of men that America needs. So heads up, Catholic men of New York, and God bless the Catholic Club and prosper it and guide it.

'When I was in Baltimore the other day, my very dear friend, His Grace Archbishop Curley, gave me a copy of the life of His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons (God rest his soul), and I was particularly struck by some words of Archbishop Ireland uttered on the occasion of the silver jubilee of His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop. The more I read these words the more I thought how applicable they were to our Good Shepherd. Please let me, as a small tribute of my affection, quote the words:

'"How noble the mission assigned to him. How well it has been followed out. He is large-minded. His vision cannot be narrowed to a one-sided consideration of men or things. He is large-hearted. His sympathies are limited by the frontiers of humanity. Careless of self he gives his best activities to the good of others. He is ready for every noble work, patriotic,

intellectual, social, philanthropic, as well as religious, and in the prosecution of these he joins hands with the labourer and the capitalist, with the white man and the black, with the Catholic and the Protestant and the Jew. He is brave. He has the courage to speak and to act in accordance with his convictions . . . the most outspoken of Catholics, the most loyal co-labourer of the Pope of Rome, the American of Americans."

'If I may digress just one moment I would like to offer a prayer before the throne of the Most High to send peace to that Motherland of mine. I can see her tear-stained face looking longingly to the west for some of her American boys to help stop the fratricidal war that is breaking her heart. The festival of Christ's birth is at hand, and forever identified with Christmas is the salutation of the angels to the shepherds on the mountain side, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good-will." I refuse to believe there are no men of good-will in Ireland. And I am convinced that with a helping hand from the sons of Innisfail over here, those men of good-will can get together. I pray with all the earnestness of my Catholic and Irish heart that the day-star of good-will will quickly "light our Isle with peace and love."

The reference to the troubles in Ireland was shrewd as well as heartfelt, since it carefully avoided taking sides and could offend no one, whatever his views. It is an unfortunate fact about Irish public life that one must always walk warily for fear of stepping on extremely sensitive toes. Only the most general expressions are safe. This is why so many songs extolling Ireland deal exclusively with the scenery or the love which Irish mothers shower upon their children. Anything else is dangerous.

x

The Christmas holiday with the children went off splendidly, and early in January John crossed to Dublin to give his first concert there for ten years. He had undertaken to give two concerts for charity, the proceeds to be de-

voted between the Mater Misericordiae Hospital and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The curiosity to hear John was as remarkable as was the welcome given him by all parties. Irish people, as I have suggested, do not always take kindly to compatriots whose reputation has been made abroad; but John had removed all suspicion from himself by having become an American citizen. ‘Abroad’ for the Irishman too often means in England, and the knowledge that England had disapproved was an added recommendation to Dublin, particularly in the year 1923.

People came by train from all parts of Ireland at a time when travelling was not only uncomfortable but positively dangerous. Any of the railway bridges which had not been blown up were likely to be. One party of girls left their home near Tipperary early on Monday morning in the hope of getting to Dublin in time for the concert on Tuesday night. They travelled by car, and had to make innumerable detours because of broken bridges.

After the first recital, a special train taking back a party of concert-goers to Athlone was held up by a train wreck beyond Mullingar, and the music lovers, tired and hungry, had to go back there for the night.

The changes noticed most by the Dublin critics after ten years were the great increase in dramatic power—the John McCormack of 1913 was a lyric tenor whose singing was passionless as a boy’s—and the astonishing command of *pianissimo*. What knocked the audience over was the warm human quality of the singing, plus that magical note, which every now and then would sound, not so much in the voice as behind it. One of James Joyce’s most famous passages ends with these words:

‘Afar! Afar! Afar! A voice from beyond the world was calling.’

It was this hint of the voice from beyond the world, this

sudden power to transfigure the simplest human emotions so that those who heard were for a moment carried beyond themselves and heard with their very souls, that was the secret of John's extraordinary hold upon audiences everywhere. Without this, his art and his pathos and the beauty of his voice would have commanded admiration, even love, but never the devotion which was poured out upon him by hundreds of thousands of simple ordinary people. John's records and concerts were best-sellers, but the appeal was more than a best-seller appeal. This light that occasionally illumined what he sang, this power that used him as its channel, reached something which is only reached now and then, but which, when it is reached, allows people for the moment to see beyond what is to what will be. It is not for nothing that John is a devout son of the Church. This is his way of rendering homage to the power which spoke through him sometimes to his audiences.

It is probable, rather it is certain, that most artists who become temporarily the channel for such powers misunderstand them and seek to control them. Those who are wise know that such grace cannot be controlled, but can only be invoked by care and labour in the building of a technique. The technique cannot command the inspiration, but it can, as it were, prepare a magnetic field into which the inspiration can flash. We know very little about these matters, and the artists themselves can tell us very little. One thing is certain: anyone who attempts to explain the devotion accorded to an artist like John McCormack in terms of mob appeal, sob stuff, sentimental ballads, and tickling the public taste, is making a mistake. The secret lies deeper than that.

xi

From Dublin, John went to Monte Carlo, where he sang several times in the royal opera. The most interesting of

these appearances was in the première of *La Foire de Soro-tchintzi*, by Moussorgsky. John took the part of Grityko, and scored a great success. The *Journal de Monaco* said of his performance:

'M. MacCormack a trouvé dans le personnage de Grityko le meilleur rôle qu'il ait interprété au cours de la saison. Il a soupiré d'adorable façon la romance du I^{er} acte: "Pleurez mon triste cœur" d'une exquise mélancolie parfumée de tendresse, toute frissonnante des grâces nostalgiques slaves. Il a dit en perfection la jolie phrase: "Rentrez jeune fille" et chanté en artiste consommé le délicieux duo du 3^e acte, qui nous a fait songer à certain duo, non moins délicieux, du *Roi d'Ys*.'

The other opera in which he sang was his old favourite, *La Bohème*. He also met old friends, including Claudia Muzio.

He returned to America for a concert tour in the late spring, and was back again in Dublin in August, where he gave two recitals at the Theatre Royal. His reception at these was even wilder than in January. The programmes were of an austerity which came as a surprise to the audience, the greater part of the numbers coming from Beethoven, Schubert, Handel, Rachmaninov, and César Franck. The austerity was relaxed in the encores, which included 'Mother Machree.'

In September, John received a remarkable honour. The freedom of the city of Dublin was conferred upon him—an honour which, according to the Lord Mayor, the celebrated Alfred Byrne, had not been conferred upon anyone within living memory. The ceremony took place at noon on Thursday, September the 6th, when John solemnly affixed his signature to the roll of honour of freemen.

CHAPTER 15

THE NEXT YEAR, 1924, John came back to London and gave his long-awaited first concert. The place chosen was the Queen's Hall; the date, Sunday, October the 6th. Although six years had elapsed since the war, there was still a considerable amount of feeling against him. A number of individuals had announced their intention of picketing the concert, or of attending it and kicking up a disturbance. In a newspaper interview on the day before the concert, John refused to be perturbed by these rumours.

'I shall treat them,' he said, 'as the Irishman put it, with silent contentment.'

All the same, it was nervous work. The Queen's Hall was packed by an audience divided between various kinds of curiosity. There were those who wanted to see if anything was going to happen, there were those who remembered John and were anxious to see what ten years had done to his voice and to his musicianship, there were those going for the first time to see whether a great reputation could be made good. Ten minutes before the time for starting, there was not a seat left in the hall, and the whole audience had over it that electric air of expectancy which tells of a special occasion.

John was assisted by a pianist, who had the unenviable task of going on first. Difficult though it must have been for the pianist, this was a good move, for it induced the audience to settle down as if to an ordinary concert before being challenged with John himself. As soon as the pianist had finished, the curtains were held aside, and John came

on. He was pale, outwardly composed, but the hands that held the little note-book were visibly trembling.

Whatever demonstration had been intended, nothing came of it. When he first appeared, there was a quick hush. Then the audience broke into applause, which became violent as he took the centre of the platform and bowed in acknowledgement. For more than two minutes the applause continued. The singer was deeply moved. He bowed again and again, the workings of his wide mouth showing his emotion. Just as the applause was dying down, a voice from the gallery cried, 'God bless you!' John bowed once more, and the clapping rose again.

It was a beginning sufficient to unnerve any artist; but the years of iron discipline and practice told, and on the first note, high and sustained, of '*Caldo sangue*', the voice was pure and perfectly steady.

The whole recital went to an extraordinary enthusiasm. There were the usual encores, the inevitable demand for 'The Pearl,' 'John! give us "The Pearl"' and the inevitable jumble of classical masterpieces with drawing-room inanities. But there was no doubt about the welcome London gave the prodigal. She not only forgave him, and took him to her heart; she did all she could to show that he had never been away.

The press next day was full of praise. Critics who had heard John in his hey-day said that the voice had lost a little of its ring at the top, and something of its volume, but they were unanimous in noting the greater intelligence and sensitiveness of the singing. The phrasing was no less free, and the singer was tackling things which he could never have sung ten years before.

One or two of the lesser papers showed signs of spite. 'I heard someone describe him as the world's worst tenor,' wrote a gossip writer, 'but that is unkind.' Many ears had been tuned critically for evidence of Americanism or of

nasality in production. All they found was the good old Irish brogue, as strong as ever.

It was a great occasion, and it removed finally from John's mind and the mind of his manager any fear as to his future reception in England. He was to give many more recitals in London, and to go many tours of the British Isles, always with success and never meeting any expression of hostility.

II

By this time John's mannerisms on the concert platform had become stabilized. I do not know how many recitals of his I attended, but the composite impression that remains is very clear.

Usually, particularly in the later years, John would come on first for a short classical group, instead of sending on an instrumentalist as at the recital just described. On several occasions when I heard him, he began with an exquisite old German *Minnelied*, which not only perfectly suited his voice and manner, but was excellent for 'singing in'—the compass not too great, the top notes touched lightly. Then would follow something by Handel. An encore would be demanded—John's audiences were always keen to get overfull value for their money. Usually the demand would be granted, and the song chosen would be in keeping with what had gone before.

The second group of songs would have a wider range, that would still be of real musical value. A typical group here would contain songs by Schubert, Donaudy (for years this composer's lovely '*Luoghi sereni e cari*' appeared in almost all John's programmes), Quilter, Elgar, and Ban-

tock, whose setting of Blake's 'Love's Secret' gave John an opportunity for marvellous singing. This group would wind up perhaps with a piece in which the instrumentalist collaborated. César Franck's '*Panis Angelicus*' was almost certain to appear if the collaborator were a 'cellist.

The encores to this group would be more various, but we would not yet have come to any of the old favourites which the audience were already beginning to demand. Mendelssohn's 'On Wings of Song' and Lidgey's beautifully simple 'Earl Bristol's Farewell' had a habit of cropping up hereabouts in the programme.

The third group would be Irish, including one of Moore's melodies, two or three of Herbert Hughes's country songs, and something else thrown in for good measure. After these the demands for encores would become uproarious. Among those granted would be 'The Meeting of the Waters' (sung to the people at the back of the stage, after a brief explanatory bow to the rest of the audience), 'Believe Me if all those Endearing Young Charms,' 'The Rose of Tralee,' Samuel Liddle's 'The Garden where the Praties Grow,' and, until 1930 or thereabout, Hardebeck's arrangement of '*Una Ban*.'

The last group was a sort of free-for-all. It contained the things which a large part of the audience had come to hear, and the encores would go on until John was so tired that he would shut the lid of the piano. No other gesture would do—not even the exhausted shrug of the broad shoulders and spreading of the hands. The audience had no pity. They knew what they wanted, and they got it.

John's platform mannerisms were few. He walked on with a kind of broad dignity difficult to describe. Just as there was about Kreisler a leonine dignity, courteous but aloof, so John at his first appearance was withdrawn and grave, no matter how impassioned his welcome. He sang with one hand clasping the little note-book, and the other

held loosely beneath it, moving occasionally in a half-gesture to supplement the expressive movements of the head. The emotion of the song, tragic, contemplative or gay, was strongly expressed upon his features; he sang usually with closed eyes, except in the lighter songs.

This quick response to emotion was balanced by a readiness to laugh at any unrehearsed incident, once the tension of the first appearance was over. I remember at a recital, just before the start of the second group, when the audience were silent, and all was in readiness for that slight inclination of the head and raising of the brows to Schneider at the piano, a fussy lady eluded the scandalized attendant and darted across in front of the platform in anxiety to find her seat. The tenor blinked, pulled himself together, gave her a little bow which she did not see, and then was shaken by an earthquake of laughter in which the audience joined.

While he was singing, John made fewer incidental noises than any other great singer to whom I have sat close. A continual soft high clearing of the throat, almost caressing in its lightness, was the only thing the audience were not intended to hear. This noise brought a spirited protest from Norval Pierce, the throat specialist.

'What the hell do you do it for?' he asked. 'You are only irritating the epithelium.'

'Well,' said John, 'it makes me feel comfortable.'

'Nonsense,' exploded the specialist. 'Supposing you get an itch on the platform, do you scratch?'

Between songs, John indulged in none of the moppings and snoochings and hawkings to which many singers unashamedly give vent on the platform.

(The most remarkable maker of incidental noises I ever heard was Chaliapin, who made small mewing sounds to himself, of the 'mi-mi-mi' variety, before each song and during the rests.)

John made no mechanical grimaces—that is, grimaces made in order to facilitate the production of a note—except on certain *fortissimo* high notes. For these he opened the top of his head as wide as he could, and that was good and wide; and the attack was often accompanied by a characteristic sideways jerk of the head. He had none of the tricks and movements whereby the majority of tenors persuade their voice to go where they want it. Even for the *pianissimo* high notes his features suffered no distortion, and his head remained in its accustomed place.

In a word, John was himself on the concert platform, not the studied conventionalized exhibit which many singers put in place of the self.

III

That summer John and Lily decided they must have a home in the old country. Their choice finally fell upon Moore Abbey, near Monasterevan, in the county of Kildare. This beautiful house was originally a monastery. Then it became the ancestral seat of the Earls of Drogheda. Because of its origins, there was something peculiarly appropriate in its coming into the possession of so devout a son of Mother Church as John.

The McCormacks took a great delight in their Irish home. It was a home to be proud of and not least of its joys was that it gave John the chance to sing regularly the music of the Mass in the church at Monasterevan, with his family round him.

For a decade Moore Abbey was well known to musicians, artists, and the crowd of notabilities that were the McCormacks' guests, and was a worthy setting for John's possessions, including his collection of pictures.

'I always had three ambitions—three, that is, besides Covent Garden. One was to own a Rolls-Royce, the second was to own a Franz Hals, and the third was to win the Derby. I realized numbers one and two all right, but I never won the Derby, though it nearly broke me trying.'

The love of pictures went back far into John's youth. It will be remembered that, when he was a student in Italy, he paid many visits to one picture. From that time on he would go to the art gallery in whatever town he visited, and the longing soon grew to have a collection of his own.

It was not to be an ordinary collection. There need not be many pictures, but they must be good, and they must be pictures that he loved. He did not keep always to these rules, although he never bought a picture which he did not like. It never occurred to him that rarity and costliness was a virtue in itself. He bought what he wanted to look at, not merely what he wanted to own. At all events, he soon found himself spending far more on pictures than he would ever have thought possible.

'I got the bug,' he says, 'and bought a lot. It's a terrible bug once it gets you.'

His first prize was a Corot. The picture was put up in open auction at the Plaza Hotel in New York. John saw it and coveted it. He went away, but was irresistibly drawn back again. Presently, with dry mouth, he asked Harry Rembrandt how much it would go for.

Rembrandt looked at him. 'Round about thirty thousand dollars,' he said.

John swallowed, turned away, and presently, when the bidding started, began to bid with the rest. At last he heard his voice say, 'Twenty thousand,' and the Corot was knocked down to him.



A FAMILY PORTRAIT

COUNT AND COUNTESS MC CORMACK WITH CYRIL AND GWEN
TAKEN AT THEIR CALIFORNIA HOME, 'SAN PATRIZIO,' HOLLYWOOD, 1931

It was a terrible sum of money, and it took some explaining to Lily afterwards; but he could feel that he had got a bargain, paying ten thousand less than an expert had calculated.

It would, I think, be pointless to give a catalogue of the pictures John possesses or has possessed. The best known of them were the Franz Hals 'Man' from the Zamoisky collection in the Blue Palace, Warsaw, for which he paid ninety thousand dollars—thus realizing his early ambition—and 'The Clavering Children' of Romney.

The walls of his Kensington studio, now, alas, forsaken, reflected a lively and individual taste. The pictures were of many different kinds, but every one was alive, not all were by celebrities, and each was an excellent example of its kind. The collection included an exquisite Paul Henry, a study of a lake in tones so delicate that those who know the painter only by his posters and popular reproductions would open their eyes wide.

One drawing, which hung in the hall, was so powerful that I stood before it in admiration. An Orpen, entitled 'The Champion,' it represented a negro boxer of magnificent stature, standing in the ring and grinning straight at the beholder. The date was 1906, and I rapidly ran over in my mind the famous negro boxers of the time. This man was a heavyweight, or as near as makes no matter. It could not be Jack Johnson—the figure was not tall enough, and there was a queer deformity about the legs. It had not Sam Langford's broad shoulders or gorilla arms, it was too ugly for Joe Jeannette, and not ugly enough for Sam McVea.

I turned to John. 'Who is it?' I asked.

'That?' he said. 'That's the Harlem Coffee-Cooler.'

My heart jumped with excitement. A couple of years earlier, when I was working on a book on boxing, *Shake Hands and Come Out Fighting*, I spent a long time, with my good friend Fred Bason, hunting for this very man,

who had fallen on hard times and lived in doss houses in the East End. We got on his track, but could not find him, and later were happy to hear that his son, who ran a dance band, had found something for the old man to do. The Coffee-Cooler's real name was Frank Craig. So amazing was his physique that in his late sixties he was still working in a boxing booth and taking on all comers.

Looking at this magnificent drawing, one might well believe it. The muscles are terrific, yet supple and relaxed. There is a silky sheen on the skin; every line of the drawing grins with life.

I asked John how he came by it.

'It was when Orpen was painting my portrait,' he said. 'I had seen a postcard reproduction of the drawing, which Joe Kerrigan¹ had. One day, while Billy was working on the portrait, I asked him where was the original. He did not know, but he said I might hunt about for it. There was a big bundle of loose drawings in the corner of the studio, and I hunted through until I found it.'

"I'll give you a fiver for it," said I.

"Stick a cipher on the end," he answered, "and it's yours."

'I gave him the cheque there and then. He laughed. He wasn't accustomed to being paid cash on the spot.'

The drawing had an extra interest for John, since he has always followed boxing. Jack Dempsey is an old friend of his, and among the hundreds of guests at Moore Abbey was Gene Tunney, that unique figure among pugilists, whose letter of thanks is almost touching in its naïf anxiety to be as much at home in the world of artists as in the ring.

The Orpen portrait of John hung high above the hearth in the Kensington studio, and was well worthy of the honour. No reproduction that I have seen does it anything

¹ This was J. M. Kerrigan, probably the best and most versatile character actor the Abbey Theatre ever produced.

like justice. It catches to perfection the look of almost childish melancholy that so often shadows John's face. It shows a vulnerable figure, sensitive, one who has been hurt and expects to be hurt again. In its insight into character, and the lyric flow of its colour and line, it is one of Orpen's most revealing portraits.

The sittings were a joy, for Orpen was a lively companion, with a fund of anecdote which could match John's. It is extremely hard to tell John a story he does not know. Those who go 'on the road' hear all the stories there are. The only way to surprise them is with a first-hand true one.

There is one drawing which John might have had, but missed through his own fault. John Sargent offered one day to do a black and white drawing of him. John was overawed by Sargent, and never went to give him a sitting.

A coincidence, or a pair of coincidences, gave John a reputation for acumen with at least one great painter. Talking one day to Augustus John, he asked him which of his early drawings the painter would recommend him to possess.

Augustus John considered, then recommended, first of all, a self-portrait.

'I have that,' the singer told him.

The painter looked surprised, and went on to recommend a landscape.

'I have that too,' John told him.

They were the only two Augustus Johns that he possessed.

v

John has always been very much the family man. This sounds a contradiction in terms when spoken of a singer

who perforce had to travel so much. But the quartet—John, Lily, Cyril, Gwen—remained compact, and close in spirit even though they were separated. For a direct affectionate nature such as John's, the ties of home can be stretched indefinitely, but never broken.

Both the children inherited a love for music and a singing voice. Cyril's was a light baritone of really excellent quality. He sang with sympathy and finish, and John seriously believes that, if he could only have been persuaded to take singing seriously, he could have won wealth and fame.

Cyril had other views. From childhood he burned with a passion for mechanics of all kinds.

'I'm not going to be a singer,' he pronounced scornfully. 'I'm going to work for my living.'

John's eyes opened to the widest at this blunt pronouncement. He almost choked—then he laughed till he was helpless.

To Cyril it was no laughing matter. He stuck to his determination, and mechanics have been his true love always. Several attempts were made to persuade him to sing professionally. He made records, and very good records they were; and twice he broadcast. Each time he was so nervous that everyone in the studio was affected, and they did not know what to do with him.

That John's opinion of his voice was influenced by no fond parental pride is shown by the following letter:

'MY DEAR CYRIL,

I cannot tell you how much pleasure your record of "Tipperary" has given us! Almost as much as your father's records. If he were not such a strong man, I would say more, but I believe in preparedness! Please give both your parents my greetings, tell them I hope to see them soon, and with love to Gwen and yourself and many thanks please think of me as

Your admirer,

ALMA GLUCK ZIMBALIST.'

If Alma Gluck did not know what good singing was, no one did.

Gwen, too, inherited a voice. Sweet and pure in quality, it remained small, almost like a boy's. Unlike her brother, she worked hard at it, and would have given anything to be a singer; but the voice did not develop sufficiently in power.

All Gwen's ambitions were for an operatic career. She was always in the opera house, and her great friend was Lucrezia Bori. One day she came to her mother.

'I am going to ask Pop to give me his candid opinion,' she said. 'Do you think he will?'

'I think so. You had better ask him.'

Accordingly she went straight to her father, and asked him to tell her honestly whether she could make a career in opera.

'No, darling,' he replied. 'I don't think you would get beyond the first act.'

The girl came back to her mother.

'Very well,' she said, 'that settles it. I am not going to bore my friends.'

She gave up all idea of a career from that moment.

At home, she and John often sang together. Miss Mary Scott told me of one evening she will never forget, when John and Gwen sang together at her house, father leading daughter up the staircase at the end of the duet from *La Bohème* so that their voices faded into the distance.

For the rest, the family remained happy and devoted, the children as proud of their father as he was proud of them.

Cyril, invited to broadcast about his father, ended as follows:

'To me my father is a perfect mixture of small boy, and grown, intelligent man. My mother says that until I grew up (if I have yet, which I very much doubt) she had two trouble-

some boys to look after, with the older one the worse of the two. His mind is quite simple and unspoilt, but marvellously active. He is extremely easy to amuse, and has what I might almost call a wicked sense of humour, which not unfrequently gets the upper hand of him. He has a most infectious laugh. All through his life my father has been guided by the principle that what is worth doing is worth doing well, whether it be work, study, or play. He has never to this day stopped working to improve himself as a singer and a musician. In the course of his travels, he has taught himself German and French, and has kept his Italian perfect. He is a voracious reader, with the most retentive memory I have ever known. Owing to his great interest in everything that is going on around him, he usually reads through at least three newspapers every morning, and at dinner that evening, he will discuss any article or paragraph you might mention, remembering it almost word for word. This is rather unfortunate for his adversary when he starts an argument, which he will do if he gets the slightest opportunity. He loves it, and he does not really mind on which side of a subject he argues, or what the subject is. I remember him making me very exasperated one evening. At considerable expense to him, I had just got a First Class in my Final Engineering Examination, and was feeling very pleased with myself. Imagine my annoyance when my father started an argument and set out to prove that I was wrong over a question in which I had gained a first a few days earlier. However, his idea is, as he says himself, that the only way to make a man tell you what he knows is to tell him he is wrong. During all his travels, he has always kept to the forefront the fact that he is an Irish Catholic, and has always been willing to work for other Irish Catholics. It was this that led up to his being created Count of the Holy Roman Empire by the Holy Father, and it is interesting to recount that on his first taking up duty as a Papal Chamberlain, the Holy Father was immensely pleased because my father spoke Italian in his own dialect, Milanese.

'In his recreation he is just as keen as in his other interests. He is almost as good as an almanac when discussing cricket, tennis, or boxing, and he puts up a very creditable performance on a tennis court, himself, being full of the will to win, even though it may only be me he is beating. In fact, into everything he does, my father brings an unbounded enthusiasm

which sometimes lands him into trouble. He cannot do anything gently but must go like a bull at a gate, frequently sweeping some other member of the family with him in his enthusiasm.

'But above all this, he is generous to a degree, as I ought to know. He is sometimes quick-tempered, but he seldom means it, and it is always over in a few moments, and it is impossible to remain annoyed with him for long, because if he sees one trying to do so, he always manages to spoil it all by making one laugh.'

'In conclusion, I think I may say that he has shown himself to be a great student, a great artist, and a great man, and I brook no contradiction when I say that he is certainly a great father.'



In 1933 Gwen was married to Mr. Edward Pyke, and on the 23rd November 1935 John became a devoted and adoring grandfather. Patricia is now the joy of his life, and, as she herself has remarked, 'Johnny spoils me, but he does love me.'

VI

All this time John's parents had lived tranquilly at home, secure in the success of their famous son. In the summer of 1925 John gave a special concert in Dublin which they attended, so to speak, in their official capacity. The old couple sat in the dress circle, Andrew the picture of health, with his rugged, ruddy face and shock of grey hair, and the old lady beside him, her face alive with happiness.

The Governor-General and his party sat in one box, the Presidential party in another. Opposite to the Governor-General's box were Lily, Cyril, and Gwen.

The concert went its usual enthusiastic way, until suddenly there came one of those inspirations, those charges of magic which struck singer and audience alike.

It happened that John was singing Crouch's 'Kathleen Mavourneen.' The drawing-room ballad of the last century had become so hackneyed that even on the music halls no one dared sing it without risking cat-calls from the audience. In some halls it was barred altogether.

But John has always been able to sing a song as if for the first time, and, as he reached the refrain, the miracle happened. In the ballad, a young lover addresses his beloved on the last night before he sails from Ireland. The dawn is breaking, and she lies asleep. He asks if she has forgotten that in a few hours they must part.

'It may be for years, and it may be for ever.'

Suddenly, for singer and audience, the song became the expression of a personal and national tragedy. All that they themselves had suffered of parting and loss, all they could imagine, all that Ireland had suffered when the emigrants left her shores, was caught up in one timeless moment with the words and music of the old song.

When the last note died away, there was a long pause. Then the audience went mad. People rose in their seats and cheered in frenzy. The old couple in the circle wept openly. The three in the box, who had caught their eye when the song began, now could meet no one's eye. They sat with bowed heads. And the singer himself had gone white as his shirt-front, and stood shaken with a feeling that came from the depths.

From that moment on, though the magic tension was relieved, he sang as if inspired. The negro spiritual 'Were You There?' held the audience in a trance, and Franck's over-ripe '*Panis Angelicus*', which normally could not stand up to the spiritual for a moment, was ennobled and made the utterance of an individual and a shared belief.

The concert ended with a pair of personal tributes. John sang 'When You Are Old and Gray' to his father, and 'Mother Machree' to his mother. This was on an easier



COUNT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

level, and it was just as well, since the warm feelings of human kindness are easier for an audience to take out into the street with them than are exaltation and magic.

VII

In 1928 a life-time of faith and zeal in the cause of that faith was fittingly rewarded. The *Universe* announced that:

'The Holy Father has been graciously pleased to confer upon Mr. John McCormack the signal honour of elevation to the Papal Peerage, with the title and dignity of a Count.'

'This latest and highest honour—Mr. McCormack is already a Knight Commander of the Orders both of St. Gregory the Great and of St. Sylvester—has been conferred, it is understood, in recognition of the great singer's eminent position in the world of art, together with his lifelong, ardent devotion to his Faith and to the Holy See, and his munificent generosity to Catholic causes both in the Old and in the New World.'

VIII

The other outstanding event of 1928 for John was a concert which he gave at the Albert Hall in June on behalf of Queen Charlotte's Hospital National Campaign for saving mothers. The occasion was more like a gala performance at Covent Garden than an ordinary concert, and every seat in the huge hall was occupied. Lady Howard de Walden, presiding over the committee which organized the concert, received Princess Beatrice and the Duchess of York. The audience was of the kind described as 'distinguished,' and the concert brought in two thousand five hundred pounds.

As soon as the shadow of talkies fell upon a dismayed Hollywood, producers began to cast speculative eyes at singers. Short items were made, in which stars of the Metropolitan, such as Martinelli, sang '*Vesti la giubba*', or some similar excerpt, which was relayed cavernously to the astonished ears of cinema audiences.

A few producers saw further. If a singer could be found whose popular appeal was already great, who spoke English recognizably, and who could act sufficiently well to be made a character in a film, instead of appearing merely as a musical interlude, there were box office possibilities on a very considerable scale.

For such a film, John was an obvious choice. He was no longer young enough nor slim enough to play the chief romantic part, but obviously a vehicle could be found for his voice, his popularity, and his portly frame.

'If ever the talkies come, John,' said Winfield Sheehan of Fox Pictures, 'I will engage you.'

The talkies came, and in 1929 Fox sent an ambassador to interview Denis McSweeney and John. Singer and manager put their heads together, and suggested five hundred thousand dollars as the figure. Fox pulled a long face, and offered instead four hundred thousand, with the option of a second picture at six hundred thousand, the option to be taken up before the first picture was completed. John and Denis insisted on the five hundred thousand—making, as they afterwards admitted, a mistake; for no second offer came along.

Payment was arranged at a hundred thousand on signing the contract, and fifty thousand a week for eight weeks.

'Mary Pickford's comments, when she heard of this contract,' said John reminiscently, 'would have to be printed on asbestos.'

Time being short, there was no opportunity for lengthy consultation in preparing a story. Such story as *Son o' My Heart* contained was written 'on the cuff,' as the studio expression has it; in other words, writer and director made it up as they went along. The one idea of the film was to give John a natural or near-natural opportunity of singing as many songs as possible; and ingenuity managed to work in no fewer than eleven 'musical numbers,' the titles of which were as follows:

- 'Then You'll Remember Me.'
- 'A Fairy Story by the Fire.'
- 'Just for To-day.'
- 'I Feel You near Me.'
- 'Kitty, My Love, Will Ye Marry Me?'
- 'The Rose of Tralee.'
- '*Luoghi sereni e cari.*'
- 'Little Boy Blue.'
- 'Ireland, Mother Ireland.'
- 'I Hear You Calling Me.'
- 'A Pair of Blue Eyes.'

As will be seen, the selections inclined to the popular rather than the classical side of John's art. With the possible exception of the first, they were well reproduced. In those days the art of dubbing had not yet been invented. Nowadays, a song in a talkie can be made first of all on a record, on which the singer can work until a perfect recording is obtained, and which can be put upon the sound-track afterwards. In 1929 the songs had to be honestly sung as part of the action, and went down on the film as they were. John's diction was naturally of the greatest service, and the songs were so well recorded on the whole that Madame Schumann-Heink advised all students of singing to go to the film.

John's rôle was romantic, but middle-aged romantic. He appeared as that familiar figure, one whose dream of love

had never been realized, but who remained unshakenly constant to the object of his youthful choice. The choice, conveniently named Mary, in order that she might be addressed through the medium of 'The Rose of Tralee,' died towards the end of the film, dreaming wistfully of what might have been, to the accompaniment of John's voice calling softly to her, as in the past, off; and falling rose petals of a strange solidity, on. The recording of the voice here was extremely beautiful and carried off a scene which otherwise was undistinguished by imagination or taste.

To get the quality, John turned his back upon the microphone. The recording experts set up a howl.

'You're wasting our time and yours. Not a note will come through.'

'Let me alone. I understand my own voice.'

And he did, as the result showed.

John—Sean, in the film—found his happiness vicariously, in bringing together a pair of young lovers. The part of Eileen was taken by Maureen O'Sullivan. It was her introduction to the screen, and her career has gone straight ahead from this pleasant start. Her acting revealed charm, personality, and above all sincerity, qualities which have earned for her the position she now holds in the affection of the public.

On the character side, the film was greatly strengthened by the inclusion of J. M. Kerrigan as an old car driver. Kerrigan had put on weight since the days when I used to see him at the Abbey Theatre, but his playing was as much a joy as ever, and he was well supported by Farrell MacDonald. Andreas de Segurola, the famous bass, made a brief and brilliant appearance in a comic part, but did not sing. He has since achieved a new fame as the teacher of Deanna Durbin. Edwin Schneider, called Vincent, doubtless out of compliment to Vincent O'Brien, strolled benignly through the film as his excellent self. I suggest in

passing that some student of psychology should enquire into the fact that musicians often do so well on the screen. In *Moonlight Sonata* Paderewski's tremendous personality eclipsed all the professional players. Stokowski in *A Hundred Men and a Girl* gave a similar impression of reality. And, in *Song o' My Heart*, Edwin Schneider was completely authentic as himself.

John's own performance dominated the film, as it was meant to. He showed himself an excellent natural actor. His personality came across from the first moment, and one scene in particular, where he stood laughing and talking beside a clipped hedge, could not have been better. True, he looked a little larger than human, but then he is a good size anyway. The performance as a whole left a most pleasant impression on the mind. Personality was exploited in the best sense of the word, and writer and director took care that each scene should allow it to express itself naturally and with conviction. The note was pitched a trifle high now and then, as in the scene when he sang Oscar Merikanto's 'A Fairy Store by the Fire' to a group of children underneath a tree, but the singer's sincerity made the scene real and swept away the taste of saccharine.

The film did John an immense amount of good, and brought his voice to a public which it had not yet reached. The press was enthusiastic, except in some sophisticated quarters, and even they had to concede to John's performance the merits of naturalness and sincerity. One critic said that he became tired of the tenor's 'adipose gambols'—but that was nobody's fault. The camera is not kind to corpulence; and so, when a few years later, John expressed his willingness to appear in a film based on the life of Tom Moore, despite his obvious aptitude for the part, there were no takers.

One of the most interesting criticisms came from the

playwright, Robert Sherwood. After praising John's singing, he went on:

'I doubt very much if it would have succeeded so well in a more laboured setting. It was Mr. McCormack himself who realized this, and who steadfastly refused to involve himself in anything remotely resembling an extravagant musical show. He would not consent to be converted by the phony alchemy of Hollywood into a romantic lover. He rejected every standard plot that was submitted to him. With the result that *Song o' My Heart* is practically plotless and, therefore, simple and thoroughly charming.'

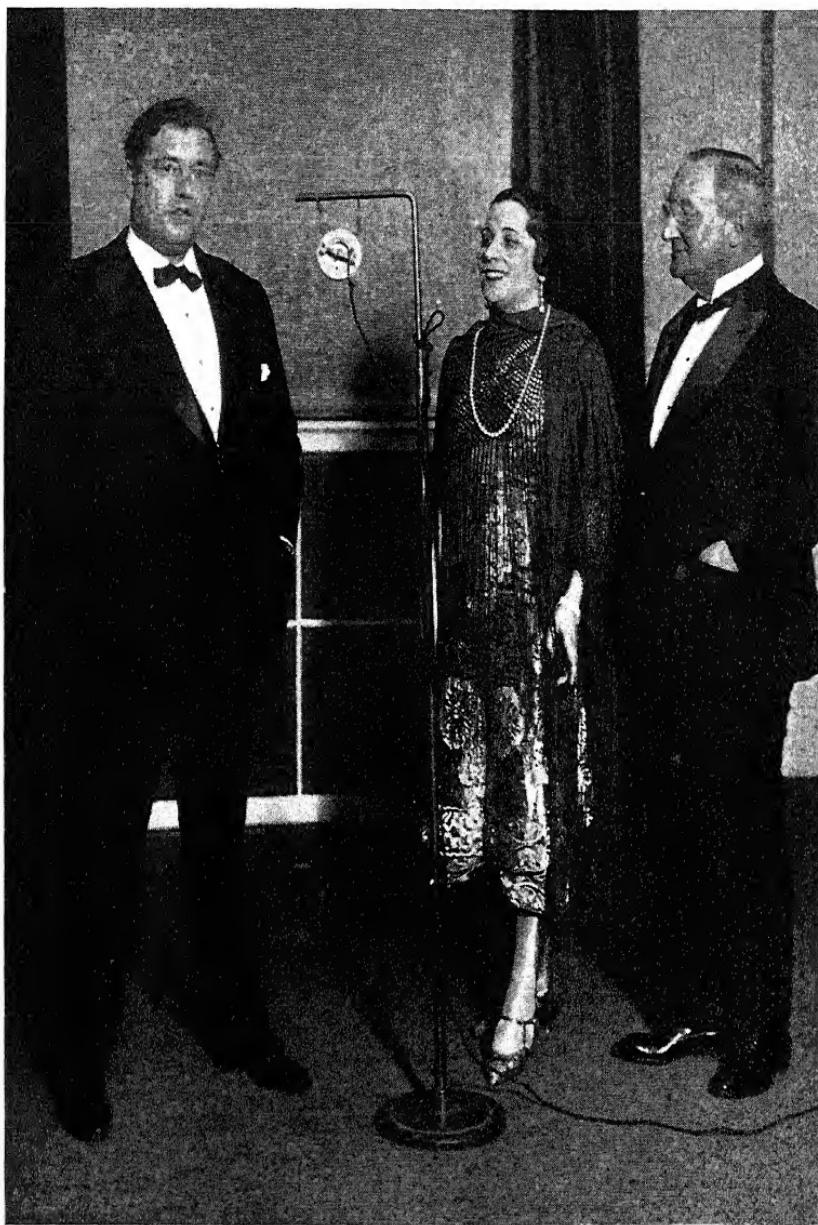
'... John McCormack has considerably more than a beautiful voice: he possesses an absolutely superhuman amount of good sense. That which he put into *Song o' My Heart* is no more important than is that which he kept out of it. . . . Although he sings a dozen times in the picture, he imposes no strain on the audience's ear-drums. His songs are introduced casually. . . . He does not sing with a mechanically broken heart; he sings only with the sincerity of an artist.'

The cast of *Song o' My Heart* was:

<i>Eileen</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Maureen O'Sullivan
<i>Fergus</i>	.	.	.	.	.	John Garrick
<i>Peter</i>	.	.	.	.	.	J. M. Kerrigan
<i>Tad</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Tommy Clifford
<i>Mary</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Alice Joyce
<i>Rafferty</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Farrell MacDonald
<i>Mona</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Effie Ellsler
<i>Aunt Elizabeth</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Emily Fitzroy
<i>Guido</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Andreas de Segurola
<i>Vincent</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Edwin Schneider
<i>Fullerton</i>	.	.	.	.	.	Edward Martindel
<i>Sean</i>	.	.	.	.	.	John McCormack

The film was directed by Frank Borzage.

John appeared in one other film, towards the end of his career. His part in this was merely incidental. He was brought in as a celebrity who lived near-by to sing to a number of distinguished guests. While he was singing, the



JOHN MC CORMACK AND LUCREZIA BORI DURING THEIR FIRST BROADCAST
IN AMERICA, 1926

CALVIN G. CHILDS, OF THE VICTOR COMPANY, IS ON THE RIGHT

host and the guest of honour walked out of the room on to a balcony.

'It was the only time,' said John, 'that my audience has walked out on me in the course of a long career.'

x

Mention of talkies naturally brings up the kindred subject of broadcasting. John has had great experience of the microphone, but has never liked it. Once in America he sang on a regular contract for forty-two weeks. Even this experience has not reconciled him to broadcasting as a medium. He is always frightened in the studio, and can never relax. The idea that his voice is at the mercy of 'some fella with a gadget in his hand' is horrible to him, and never leaves his mind.

He recalls always G. K. Chesterton's remark about broadcasting, made to him when they were together in Dublin in 1932.

'I depend,' said G. K., 'for whatever spontaneous joke comes to me, upon the chuckle from the one before. In the broadcasting studio I feel as if I were speaking into an unfathomable hole without an echo.'

Since his retirement John has broadcast several times for the B.B.C., once joining his old friend Freddie Grisewood in a kind of cross-talk act, interspersed with songs, and broadcast to the forces. His character and personality came through strongly, but those who knew him best could tell, from his breathing when he was speaking, that he was not perfectly at ease.

His real trouble is that he feels that the microphone is an enemy to good singing, and that in the studio he is at his enemy's mercy.

CHAPTER 16

IT IS DIFFICULT, looking back upon a career crowded with incidents and encounters, to remember in their proper place anecdotes which arise rather from the personalities concerned than from any special incident. For that reason I have gathered into one chapter, with the help of my volatile subject, a few personal impressions and remembrances of the people he remembers best.

With some friends the lives of the McCormacks are so closely bound up that it is impossible to pick the thread out of the pattern and place impressions and memories in chronological order. From the day they first met, Kreisler has been one of the family's dearest and closest friends. They remember not so much incidents about him as his presence in their lives.

Of the pictures which arise, the most familiar is of Kreisler, on warm evenings, taking off his coat after dinner and wandering from room to room of the house, playing to himself and anyone who would listen. John would sing, and the two would make music for the sheer joy of it, breaking off to talk, to have a drink, to wander out in the garden, in a harmony of which the music was a symbol.

Kreisler was devoted to Gwen and Cyril, who adored him, and to this day call him Uncle Fritz. When Cyril reached his seventh birthday, Kreisler gave him a gold watch, which, alas, was ultimately stolen by a hotel chambermaid.

The joy of Kreisler's life was to catch a fish. Unlike

John, he did not mind in the least how small it was, or how long he had to wait before he caught it. John loved fishing, but was always impatient; Kreisler would sit for hours, a beatific smile upon his face, utterly happy. There was a never-to-be-forgotten day when he succeeded in catching a hideous and enormous skate. The leapings and flappings of the capture were most inconvenient to everybody else in the boat, but the violinist was in heaven.

II

Another violinist who came often to the house was Zimbalist, husband of Alma Gluck. Connoisseurs of violin playing remember the marvellous records of Bach's Concerto for two violins which Zimbalist made with Kreisler, a partnership which can never have been excelled.

Zimbalist and Alma Gluck had a little boy, who the soprano insisted would become a great violinist. As soon as she thought he was old enough, she bought him a violin. Zimbalist came in in the evening, found the violin, and broke it across his knee.

'No!' he exclaimed. 'Our boy shall have a childhood.'

He himself had been taken off from the age of six to spend hours of practice daily under his master, Auer, and he was resolved that his child should be spared.

III

Paderewski appears in the McCormacks' lives both as pianist and politician. Though at his country's call this man of double genius gave himself up entirely to her needs, he never for a moment forgot his art.

John ran into him one day during the last war, when he was working hard on political propaganda.

'Do you play now, Maestro?' John asked him.

Paderewski sadly shook his head.

'For one hundred and thirty-six days,' he said, 'I have not put a hand to a piano.'

The exact figure was more eloquent than any protestation or complaint.

A few years later, in 1922, Paderewski made a remark to John which showed his power of prophetic intuition.

John had just been to Ireland. Heedless of the rest of the company, Paderewski took him away to a corner of the room and questioned him closely and carefully about what the Irish Free State hoped to do, and what were its chances.

When John had finished, Paderewski considered for a moment, nodding his magnificent head. He leaned forward, took John's knees between his own, and said:

'I can see a great future for your country; but for mine, none. None—between the sickle of Russia and the hammer of Germany.'

One day the two men were dining together at the house of a very wealthy man. John had been playing golf that afternoon, and, during the game, had heard a bird which sang repeatedly a musical phrase.

Paderewski looked up. 'What was the phrase?' he asked.

For reply, John whistled it. Paderewski made him whistle it several times.

'I would like to be able to whistle,' he said sadly.

IV

From that first occasion when he signed his photograph 'Very friendly,' Caruso moved in and out of the McCormacks' lives until his death. Caruso was that rarity—a singer

without a spark of jealousy. More, he never spoke unkindly of a colleague. Even though no one could challenge his pre-eminence in his own field, Caruso, had he been a lesser man, might well have been jealous of the young Irish tenor's success and his hold upon the American public. Instead, Caruso rejoiced in this success, and John's admiration for his singing was unbounded, the tribute of one great artist to another: Caruso would affectionately curse John for the *pianissimi* which, for all his surpassing technique, he could not emulate, and John would stand in awe before the trumpet tones and the flawless power that were beyond his own compass.

One morning, when the two met, John hailed him cheerfully in Italian.

'And how is the King of Tenors to-day?' he asked.

Caruso's reply came like lightning.

'Since when have you become a bass?'

One the evening when John made his début as guest artist at the Metropolitan in 1914, to sing *Madame Butterfly* with Geraldine Farrar, Caruso presented himself in his dressing-room in hat and cloak.

John grinned at him.

'What are you doing here, Rico, on your day off?'

Caruso drew himself up.

'Do you think,' he enquired, in offended tones, 'I would be capable of letting you go on without coming to wish you well?'

Caruso was a favourite with the McCormack children, and Gwen possesses one snapshot which must have turned her school friends sick with jealousy. Taken on board ship, it shows her sitting on the rail, with Caruso kissing her on one cheek and Scotti on the other.

And John, when he went to the Carusos, was greeted in the same way by their little daughter, Gloria. She would always insist on sitting up on nights when the McCor-

macks came to dinner, and her question always was, ‘What will I sing for Johnnie to-night?’

Only once, during his last illness, did John ever hear Caruso speak bitterly. Caruso’s successor at the Metropolitan, chosen with his full approval, was a young Italian of immense promise, Beniamino Gigli. Caruso had instantly realized the quality of his voice, and prophesied that he would have a great future: a prophecy which time has made good.

Caruso was to have sung *Andrea Chénier*, an opera in which he excelled, and had made his own. When he was ill, the Metropolitan put on Gigli in his place.

‘He might have waited till I was dead,’ said Caruso quietly.

v

Of Gigli, John confirms Caruso’s view, and can say more, having seen his career come to maturity.

‘It is,’ he said, ‘the most beautiful tenor voice I have ever heard, excepting only Caruso’s.’

He went on to say that Gigli’s first performance in Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* was one of the greatest occasions the Metropolitan has ever known.

vi

Of another famous tenor, Martinelli, John tells the following pleasing anecdote.

Martinelli came one day into his dressing-room, and after the usual compliments, said, 'May I ask a question?'
'Sure. Go on.'

'Did you find marriage interfere with your career?'

'Not at all.'

'Good. Then I will take a wife.'

VII

So many characters cross the scene that, if this chapter is not to degenerate into a catalogue, ruthless editing is necessary.

Noble and dignified, with his handsome ravaged face and exquisite hands, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson appears. When he was playing in the States, John went one evening to see him, and called in afterwards at his dressing-room.

'My dear McCormack. This is a wholly unexpected pleasure. How are you here? I did not see your name on the list.'

'How would you? I bought my tickets in the ordinary way.'

Forbes-Robertson stiffened.

'Never, McCormack,' he said severely, 'as long as we are both on the public stage, will you do that again.'

And it took John some time to soothe him down and persuade him that he had intended no courtesy in paying for a seat instead of asking for it.

VIII

That powerful and extraordinary personality, Governor Al Smith, makes several appearances. At a dinner when the subject of singing came up, he leant across, smiling broadly.

'I can sing "Kathleen Mavourneen," not *quite* as well as you, John; but, darn it, I can sing it pretty good.'

Having watched him at a political reception, John came up to him with a question.

'Governor, why do you stand with your back to the wall when you talk to these politicians?'

'Because then I know there is nobody behind my back.'

IX

General Pershing makes a brief and rather negative appearance. John sang before him once and included a new song which was the rage in America at the moment. Its title was 'When Pershing's Men Go Marching into Picardy.' The general listened unmoved to this stirring ditty, and did not applaud at the end.

X

Sir Basil Zaharoff, about whom so much has been said and written, was anything but a sinister figure to the McCormacks. At Monte Carlo he used to ask John to dinner to meet all sorts of illustrious Frenchmen, so that they could hear him talk. The phenomenon of a singer with a mind and a knowledge of the world outside his own profession never ceased to astound Zaharoff.

When John thanked him for coming to the opera to hear him sing, Zaharoff waved the thanks aside.

'I would not have come,' he said gruffly, 'if I hadn't wanted to hear you.'

The Marchese Marconi, whom John had met first of all in 1908 at the Irish Club in Charing Cross Road, made many appearances.

'I am jealous of Giovanni,' he said to Lily at their first meeting. 'He speaks better Italian than I do, and I was born in Italy.'

The tribute delighted John, for Marconi was anything but an uncritical admirer. He was a connoisseur of opera, and, when John was singing, he would always go round to Lily in the interval and tell her just how he thought her man was doing.

The last time John saw him was in the ante-chamber at the Vatican, when he was on duty as Chamberlain there in May 1935. Marconi came, with the Marchesa and their child, for an audience with the Holy Father.

They chatted together for fifteen or twenty minutes, while the baby kept up a string of questions as to why they wore swords '*nella casa del Papa*', and why the Colonel of the Noble Guard carried a little stick as well as a big sword.

'The stick,' said Marconi gently, 'is to keep little girls good, and prevent them from asking too many questions.'

The child remained very quiet after that, and stood holding tightly to her mother's hand; but every now and then, when Marconi was not looking, she would whisper a question into her mother's ear.

Needless to say, John knew all the noted Irishmen of his time. There are so many that it would be invidious to make

selections, but place must be given to Tim Healy, whose rich character and wit have made him immortal in Irish history. John's memories of him are long. He was first introduced to him at the House of Commons in 1908, and later on the politician was often a guest at Moore Abbey.

Healy had a tremendous memory and a great taste in songs, particularly in the vernacular. He knew 'Come-all-ye's'—that is, ballads beginning with an invitation to come and listen—with as many as forty or fifty verses, and never faltered or hesitated when he sang them.

His ear was very acute: so acute that, although he was unfamiliar with the German language, he was able to detect discrepancies in John's pronunciation and twit him with them afterwards.

Unhappily, the samples John has of his wit are too pungent and personal for public repetition.

XIII

No Irishman prominent in music could help sooner or later meeting George Bernard Shaw. The McCormacks first met Shaw at Lady Lavery's. Lily was put next to him at dinner. She was scared and very shy. Shaw leaned over to her.

'You know,' he said. 'I do not think I am going to like that husband of yours as well as I thought I would.'

'Oh, Mr. Shaw!' cried Lily. 'Why don't you like my John?'

'Because my wife is always out buying his records, and I don't get any money.'

And from that moment Lily was his devoted and faithful admirer.



WITH HIS GRANDDAUGHTER

No one could wind up this chapter more fittingly than that prince of tenors, Jean de Reszke. In his later days, when the McCormacks came to know him personally, de Reszke had to be careful of his health, and was not allowed out at night. Accordingly he asked Lily to tell him when John was singing at a matinée. One afternoon John was to sing in *The Barber of Seville*, so Lily got tickets and let de Reszke know.

Lily has never forgotten that visit to the opera house. The staff almost went down on their knees to the great tenor. During the performance, every time John sang anything of which de Reszke particularly approved, he would turn and smile at Lily and hum the phrase over to himself.

Another time, he made John come and sing for his pupils. ‘There,’ he said, when it was over, ‘that is the way I want you to sing.’

CHAPTER 17

THE QUESTION OF John's retirement was one which had often come up in the McCormack family, and which was occasionally put to him by newspaper men with more appetite than tact. John took a common-sense view of the matter.

'I shall retire in good time,' he said, 'so that they will ask "Why do you?"—not "Why don't you?"'

No one hitherto had asked 'Why don't you?' and there was no sign of a weakening hold upon audiences in the U.S.A. or in England. A McCormack recital in the big towns could be relied upon to fill any hall. In London, John was one of the small handful of artists who could fill the Albert Hall. According to one of the best known London concert agents, there were only three others.

But John was in his fifties, and the strain of 'the road' was beginning to tell even on a frame as robust as his. He began to think longingly of being able to travel and see places in his own time, not according to the merciless time-table of his bookings. While he still had health and vigour, he wanted to get about and enjoy himself. And more than anything, he wanted to leave behind a reputation undimmed by the usual antics of singers past their prime. He did not want to strain the affection which the public had so generously given him, to depend on their loyalty rather than their impulse.

Accordingly, he made his farewell tour in America during the winter of 1936–7, his last American concert being

given at the Consistory Auditorium at Buffalo on March the 16th.

As a matter of interest, here is the programme. It may surprise those who still regard him as a singer of trifles only:

1. (a) 'Caro Amor' (Pastor Fide) Handel
 (b) 'Where E'er You Walk' (Semele) Handel
 2. (a) 'Memnon' Arthur Foote
 (b) 'Grieve Not, Dear Love' ("Earl Bristol's Farewell") C. A. Lidgey
 - (c) 'Alma Mia' (Floridente) Handel
 (d) 'When Night Descends' Rachmaninoff
 3. Irish Folk-Songs—
 (a) 'The Bard of Armagh' Arranged by Hughes
 (b) 'Green Grows the Laurel' Arranged by Hughes
 (c) 'The Star of the County Down' Arranged by Hughes
 (d) 'O Mary Dear' ('The Londonderry Air') Arranged by Edwin Schneider
 4. (a) 'Far Apart' Edwin Schneider
 (b) 'Mary Shaw' (Traditional Scottish Melody) Arranged by MacLeod
 (c) 'The Song of the Seals' Granville Bantock
 (d) 'When I Have Sung My Songs' Ernest Charles

II

His farewell tour of Britain took place in the summer and autumn of 1938, culminating in a grand farewell at the Albert Hall on November the 27th.

A tremendous audience gathered—though many refused to believe that this could indeed be John's farewell. The family were present in force, as were all John's friends,

old and new, who could possibly come. Miss Mary Scott sat in one of the boxes, and Cyril was here, there, and everywhere, replying to anxious queries that his father was in excellent form. John's adopted country was represented by its very popular ambassador, Mr. Joseph Kennedy, whom I noticed at the end, standing up and applauding obstinately (in common with thousands of other people) when John, having given several encores, disappeared behind the curtains and showed no signs of coming out.

Cyril was right: John was in excellent form. Not having heard him for two years, I noticed that he sang carefully at first, and kept well within his powers until the last group, when once he let himself go upon a *fortissimo* high note. Taking the recital as a whole, I have never heard him sing better. It was an astonishing performance. The encores alone would have exhausted most singers. At no point was the least indulgence called for; at no point did one think, 'He used to be able to do that better.'

At the end, the audience simply would not go away. When at last John came on once more—I have lost count of the times—and sang Moore's 'Believe Me if All' we went away, well content that that graceful song should be the last we heard him sing. By so leaving, we missed a final encore and the speech with which he wound up a most memorable afternoon.

The press tributes to the concert were cordial and enthusiastic.

Apart from the more sensational papers, which made great play with the romance of his career, the presence of his family and of Miss Mary Scott, and other matters not strictly connected with the art of song, there were many notices which were summed up in the one word 'Why?' ¹

Edwin Evans in the *Daily Mail* began his notice:

¹ When 'Why?' was shouted at him by an audience in his farewell tour in Ireland, John replied simply, 'It's hard work for a grandfather.'

'Listening to John McCormack at the Albert Hall, it was difficult to discern any reason why he should think of retiring.

'His voice is as sound and as firmly controlled as ever. His enunciation is still an example to most singers, and a reproof to the many whose words are unintelligible.

'He is not free from mannerisms, but these have long been familiar and have not grown more pronounced. They are, in fact, part of his characteristic style. Why should he retire?'

Richard Capell, in the *Telegraph*, said:

'Time, indeed, has only begun to touch his art. True, he can no longer sustain a classical melody as he did thirty years ago, when he was Covent Garden's perfect Don Ottavio, and yesterday he sometimes resorted to a quasi-falsetto tone.

'But in two aspects, the one represented by his singing of exquisite little songs by Hugo Wolf, the other, of course, by his fetching Irish ditties, he still remains not far from his prime. Towards the end of the afternoon, in one of the more sentimental effusions which the occasion probably demanded, he asserted that "When I have sung my songs to you I shall sing no more"; but if Mr. McCormack is right to have closed his account with the Albert Hall, his performance of "*Herr, was trägt*," from Wolf's *Spanish Book*, was so beautifully done as to leave a desire that in more intimate circles the last may still not have been heard of him.'

And there were many others to the same effect. All united in paying tribute to the beautiful accompanying of Gerald Moore, who became John's accompanist after Schneider had retired.

III

As a matter of fact, John did sing again in public, only a few days later. This was at a special concert at the Dorchester Hotel, attended by the Queen. At the end of it,

he distinguished himself, quite unselfconsciously, by his violent enthusiasm and fervour in cheering the Queen when she left. People laughed, and one remarked that at heart he was still a schoolboy. John did not notice: he was far too much taken up with his delight in the occasion.

IV

There is a postscript to John's public career, but as it is only a postscript, little need be said of it. When the war began, he came out of his retirement and once more offered his services to the Red Cross. Since then he has toured the country as of old, and swears he will go on doing so as long as there are half a dozen people left who will pay to hear him.

The receipts of the Red Cross suggest that it will be a long time before he has to depend on that half-dozen.

V

The John McCormack of to-day remains very much the boy who came to London to make his fortune. The 'Irish enthusiasm' of which Boosey complained—in other words, the blurting out of vigorous comment—is there still. I would give a lot for leave to transcribe some of his comments on my manuscript. I dine out on them instead.

Not long ago he was taking over a house from a lady who had decorated it in rather opulent style. John looked with baleful eye at the hangings and the fal-lals. His glance

halted on a vast chandelier which drooped from the centre of the ceiling.

'I'll have that down,' he said, half to himself.

'Oh, Count M'Cormack,' protested the lady, 'if you remove that, you will take away the room's character.'

He rounded on her.

'With the help of God, I *will* take away the room's character.'

His real enthusiasms are, as they always have been, violent and liable to sudden eclipse. It is significant that the McCormacks have never stayed in any house for the full term of their lease. John will be all excitement for doing up the new house, will have marvellous plans, will spend money lavishly to model it after his heart's desire. Then, once it is all accomplished, he will begin to want another which he can model and alter in the same way.

While he had the picture bug, he was a source of constant anxiety to Lily. She could never leave the house for half an hour without coming back to find one of Duveen's men up a ladder hanging a fresh picture on the wall. Before she could remonstrate, John would meet her with reassurances.

'It's only here on approval,' he would say. 'I am just going to see how it looks on the wall. If we don't like it, sure we will send it back.'

But Lily knew well enough that the picture was paid for already and would stay. John always paid cash on the nail. He hated to owe money.

Perhaps the dislike was strengthened by one of the few occasions on which he really bought something on approval. When he and Lily were first in London, and had no money, John would bewail the fact that he was unable to give her any jewellery, and bid her wait until he could afford the real thing.

'I will never give you any of this cheap trumpery stuff,'

he said. 'That is vulgar. You will have nothing but the best.'

Later on, when there was money, the promise was made good. John had an instinct for the best in jewels as in pictures. He would pore over a tray of rings, or pendants, and, refusing all help from the salesman, would finally point to one stone and say, 'Now that's the one I fancy.'

And, invariably, it was of the first quality.

But the occasion I have in mind happened in New York. After the signing of a particularly brilliant contract, John rushed off to the jewellers and bought on approval an enormous and very valuable emerald. Lily, when she heard its price, cried out that nothing would induce her to wear it.

'I am not going to have my neck wrung for the sake of any old stone,' she protested; and when John saw that she would be unhappy and afraid to wear it, lest she should be attacked by jewel thieves, he took it back to the shop. There he had an unpleasant shock. The jewellers did not wish to take the stone back. They said he had kept it over the specified period, and charged him a percentage of the purchase price, with the result that his brief guardianship of the emerald cost him nine hundred pounds.

Another enthusiasm was for yachts and boats of all kinds. In this he was aided and abetted by Cyril, whose passion for mechanics centred upon the engines. The boat would be bought, money spent on her, trips begun—and then John would return for weeks on end to his old love, tennis, and Lily would have to take her friends for trips to keep the boat in use.

But it was no good being angry with John. Once, very early in their married life, when Lily was about to give him a well-deserved scolding, he made a pathetic face at her, put his head on one side, and said:

'Oh—aren't you going to let me be happy, though married?'

And the scolding was never given.

This defence did not always work, and there were many scoldings, but most of them were given more from duty than conviction. They are often necessary still. John, who was meticulous in his dress on the platform, will take no trouble about it in private. He will wear an old hat for years, and Lily has to make herself unbearable before she can drive him to look after himself or have his meals at the proper times.

In fact, William Ludwig had the right of it. John needed someone to look after him, and he always will.

VI

When I was writing about the first Harrison tour in 1908, I said that the artists in the company got on happily together and learned to know and like one another. This drew from John a vehement protest which tells more about him than many paragraphs.

'Come, come,' he wrote in the margin, 'you can do better than this. I know you, but God! how I should hate to hear you say you *liked* me.'

Everything in his life is painted in strong colours. There is nothing indeterminate, nothing grey. A training which accustoms one to superlatives has accorded perfectly with a nature which thinks and feels in superlatives. The tributes which singers pay each other are, to say the least of it, warmly worded, and an expansive nature can flow out in complete sincerity with the words. If any picture of the man is drawn in these pages, it should above all convey a sincerity which is both impulsive and deep, a spontaneous warmth of life, an ebullient, even a violent energy, and an imagination accessible to all emotion, and swiftly

kindled. The singer whose story is told here is a man with hosts of friends and not a few enemies: but any one of the enemies could turn himself into a friend at a moment's notice by frankly approaching the object of his dislike and proposing that bygones should be bygones.

The reasons why John and Caruso got on so well are speedily found. The Irishman had all the Italian's warmth of heart and much of his generosity. It would not be true to say that, like Caruso, he never spoke ill of a colleague. He is too witty, he has too much of the natural Irishman in him, to refrain.

'What are you doing here?' he said to the wife of a brother tenor, who came round to see him at his farewell. 'Come to count the house?'

But it is all talk. He will exchange hard knocks in fair fight, but he is incapable of personal malice, and would do no man an injury.

He has the merits and defects of a simple, straightforward nature. There is much of the child in him, and will be till he dies. He is as shrewd as they are made, perceptive on his own wave-length as any woman, vulnerable always, enormously happy, violently dejected.

'May God keep you in the palm of His Hand,' he will say to a friend at parting, and mean each word.

The faith expressed in that blessing sustains him day and night, and is as real to him as the bed he sleeps in.

APPENDIX A

SINCE the gramophone record is our most valuable evidence of a singer's art, and since there are now so many enthusiastic collectors of records, I thought it might be interesting to append a list of records made by the singers mentioned in this book. For more than three quarters of the details which follow I have to thank my good friend Ronald Phillips, whose expert knowledge goes back to the beginning of gramophone history.

When a singer is mentioned in the book and does not appear in the appendix, neither of us has been able to trace any recording.

Records marked with an asterisk are in my own collection and I can recommend them. Mr. Phillips's choices are described in the text.

AINO ACKTÉ. Soprano. Recorded for various companies between 1903 and 1905. The best of her records was possibly Odeon 36868 '*Je t'aime*' (Grieg).

One disc is still obtainable in the Parlophone Historic Series: Parlophone PO 93 *Faust*: 'Jewel Song' and *Lohengrin*: 'Elsa's Dream.'

MADAME ALBANI. Recorded in 1904 for the Gramophone & Typewriter Co. All her recordings are now withdrawn. Her most popular record was

0301 'Angels ever bright and fair' (Handel).

FRANCES ALDA made her first series of recordings in 1910 for the Victor Company. Of this first series, one is still available in the H.M.V. catalogue, DK119 *Trovatore*: '*Miserere*' (with CARUSO); but the others have been withdrawn for many years, including Victor 88247 *Falstaff*:

Sul fil d'un soffio.' No subsequent recording of this aria approached Mme Alda's.

PASQUALE AMATO. Recorded for the Fonotipia and H.M.V.-Victor Companies. Especially fine were his

H.M.V. 2-052051 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: 'Largo al factotum' and H.M.V. 2-052079 *I Due Foscari*: 'O vecchio cor che batti.*

Some ten titles are still available, including

H.M.V. DK110 *Puritani*: 'Suoni la tromba' (with JOURNET) and *Otello*: 'Brindisi' (with ENSEMBLE).

H.M.V. DM106 *Forza del Destino*: 'Invano, Álvaro' (with CARUSO) and *Forza del Destino*: 'Le minaccie' (with CARUSO).

DALTON BAKER recorded for the Odeon Company, and later for Columbia. Typical of his work is

Odeon 0254 'She is far from the Land' (Lambert).

AMEDEO BASSI recorded for the Fonotipia Company in 1906. His recordings are admired by collectors largely because the selections are usually of little-known airs. They include tenor arias from Giordano's *Siberia* and d'Erlanger's *Tess*.

MATTIA BATTISTINI, '*la gloria d'Italia*', recorded over a period of nearly twenty years as an exclusive Gramophone Co. artist. Few copies exist of his first series, made at Warsaw in 1903, but the following discs are still available:

H.M.V. DB198 *Ballo in Maschera*: 'Alla vita che t'arride' and *Ernani*: 'Vieni meco, sol di rose' (with EMILIA CORSI).

H.M.V. DB200 *Ballo in Maschera*: 'Eri tu che macchiavi' and *Ernani*: 'Lo vedremo, o veglia audace.'

H.M.V. DB207 *Lucia di Lammermoor*: 'Cruda, funesta, smania' and *Don Sebastino*: 'O Lisbona!'

Of the records no longer to be purchased, the finest which I have heard is H.M.V. DB209 *Marta*: 'Il mio Lionel.' * The original H.M.V. recording of 'Eri tu' must be distinguished from one which replaced it in the catalogue, and which was made towards the end of his career.

DAVID BISPHAM (1857-1921) began his recording career in 1902 with a handful of recordings for the Gramophone & Typewriter Co. Copies of these recordings, which included 2-2682 'Sapphische Ode' (Brahms) and

2-2686 *Falstaff*: 'Quand' ero paggio'
are very seldom found, and most historic record collections represent him with examples from the series that he made from 1906 to 1911 for the American Columbia Co. This series includes favourite items from opera, oratorio, and the concert repertoire. Representative items are

30016 'Danny Deever' (Damrosch).

30019 'Der Erlkönig' (Schubert).

A5099 *Semele*: 'Where E'er You Walk.'

A5100 *Elijah*: 'It is Enough.'

A5137 *Trovatore*: 'Il balen.'

Of the eight discs in my collection, the best vocally is

384 { 'Oft in the Stilly Night' (Moore).

{ 'The Arrow and the Song' (Balfe).

ALESSANDRO BONCI (1872-1940) was the star artist of the Italian Fonotipia Company, and the series of recordings that he made for them in 1904 includes some fine examples of his art. Items such as:

39084 *Puritani*: 'A te, o cara,'

39240 *Carmen*: 'Romanza del fiore,'

39338 *Favorita*: 'Spirto gentil,' etc.,

are regarded by many judges as standard versions, by which all subsequent versions must be judged.

Bonci continued to record for the Fonotipia Company until 1909. After that date he recorded exclusively for Columbia. The majority of the Columbia items were re-recordings of titles already made for the Fonotipia concern. Two of Bonci's early Fonotipia records have been reissued by the Parlophone Company on

PXO81 *Faust*: 'Salve dimora' and *La Bohème*: 'Che gelida manina.' *

Of the Columbia recordings, the pick are

D8085 *Tosca*: 'Recondita armonia' (especially) and 'E lucevan le stelle.' *

D17533 *La Bohème*: 'Che gelida manina' and *Elisir d'Amore*: 'Una furtiva lagrima.' *

A pupil of Jean de Reszke told me that the master used Bonci's Columbia 'Che gelida manina' as a lesson in tenor production.

CELESTINA BONINSEGNA recorded for the Gramophone,

Columbia, and Pathé Companies. She had a fine recording technique and most of her discs are regarded as 'Collectors' pieces.' Such discs as

Columbia A5194 *Trovatore*: 'D'amor sull' ali rose' and 'Tacea la notte,'

Columbia A5197 *Norma*: 'Casta Diva.'

(both withdrawn) are considered by some judges to be the finest versions ever made.

H.M.V. DB493 *Forza del Destino*: 'Madre pietosa' and 'Pace, mio Dio,'

still available, is a worthy specimen of her art.

LUCREZIA BORI (b. 1888) has been for many years a favourite artist of the Victor Recording Company (issued in England on H.M.V.). With John McCormack she recorded

H.M.V. 7-54003 *La Bohème*: 'O soave fanciulla' * and

H.M.V. 2-054055 *Traviata*: 'Parigi, o cara' * (this latter is still available on DM104 coupled with the *Rigoletto Quartet*, with MCCORMACK, JACOBY, and WERRENRATH).

Her solo recordings include excerpts from Mascagni's *Iris*, a rôle that was one of her greatest triumphs at the Metropolitan, New York; and a number of Spanish songs. A few of her later recordings are still available in the current H.M.V. catalogue. Mr. Phillips advises the discriminating collector to get

DM104 (above) and

DK102 *Don Pasquale*: 'Norinia-Malatesta Duet' (with GIUSEPPE DE LUCA).

BORGHILD BRYHN recorded for the Scandinavian branch of the Gramophone Co. in 1908. Her initial effort consisted of some half a dozen Norwegian songs, including the charming but little known

83670 'Ragnhild' (Grieg).

ROSINA BUCKMAN was the star artist in the first H.M.V. venture into complete opera recording, *Madame Butterfly*. Other H.M.V. recordings include excerpts from Dame Ethel Smyth's opera, *The Boatswain's Mate*. A prolific recording artist, Miss Buckman also made many discs for the Pathé and Columbia Companies.

TOM BURKE recorded for Columbia, and later for the Crystalete Companies. A representative Columbia disc still in the current catalogue is

D1593 *La Tosca*: 'E lucevan le stelle' and *Turandot*: 'Nessun dorma.'

The second title gives an idea of the heroic power of his voice. His record of 'Che gelida manina' (Columbia 7347) is well worth getting. The aria which he sang best of all, 'Ah fuyez douce image,' from Massenet's *Manon*, was never recorded.

CLARA BUTT recorded first for H.M.V., and later for Columbia. Many of her records are still to be had. The best I have heard is a Columbia of the recitative and aria, 'Frondi tenere: Ombra mai fu' from Handel's *Serse*.

ENRICO CARUSO. To Caruso we owe many records besides his own. The power and beauty of his records for H.M.V. converted many singers and many musicians to a startled belief in the possibilities of the gramophone, which hitherto they had looked on as a toy. After tentative recording efforts with the Pathé and Zonofono Companies, in 1902 Caruso began an association with the Gramophone Co. (H.M.V.) that lasted till his death. During that period he made nearly 300 recordings, most of which enjoyed huge sales. Opera in Italian and French; songs in Italian, French, Neapolitan, Spanish, Latin, a dubious English; solos and concerted numbers: such was the glamour of his name that each disc was guaranteed a wide circulation even before it appeared. The following are Mr. Phillips's recommendations:

DA112 *Tosca*: 'Recondita armonia' and 'E lucevan le stelle.'

DB111 *Pagliacci*: 'Vesti la giubba' and 'No, pagliaccio non son.' *

DB117 *Africana*: 'O Paradiso' and *Carmen*: 'Romanza del Fiore.' *

DB141 'La Danza' and 'Tarantella sincera.' *

DB144 *Aida*: 'Celeste Aïda' * and *Salvator Rosa*: 'Mia piccirella.'

DQ100 *Rigoletto*: Quartet and *Lucia*: Sextet with GALLICURCI, DE LUCA, JOURNET, ETC.

DB700 *Don Sebastiano*: 'In terra solo' and *Andrea Chénier*: 'Un di all' azzurro.'

2-032005 *Manon* (Massenet): 'Ah fuyez douce image.' *
A few years ago, the Gramophone Co. endeavoured to

give the Caruso recordings the benefit of modern orchestral accompaniments.

LINA CAVALIERI (*b.* 1874), whose remarkable beauty contradicted the traditional idea of prima donnas, made several records for the Columbia Company. The best of these,

A5178 *Tosca*: 'Vissi d'arte' and *Manon Lescaut*: 'In quelle trine morbide,'

is no longer available, but the following disc is still listed in the current Columbia catalogue:

A5179 *Carmen*: 'Habañera' and 'Maria, Mari!' (Capua).

FEODOR CHALIAPIN recorded for the Moscow branch of G. & T. in 1901, before his name had any significance outside Russia, and it is unlikely that the discs were distributed outside that country. They revealed his quality, and the interpretations were of a more orthodox character than his subsequent issues. All of the (5) titles were recorded again later on. Many of his later recordings are still available and the following typical examples are recommended by Mr. Phillips.

H.M.V. DB 932 'Song of the Flea' * (Moussorgsky) and *Barbiere* (Rossini): 'La calunnia.'

H.M.V. DB1525 'Elégie' (Massenet) and 'Gold Rolls Here Below Me' (Rubinstein).

H.M.V. DB3464 'Prayer and Death of Boris Godounoff' * (Moussorgsky) (recorded during actual Covent Garden performance).

The earlier record of the *Boris* scenes, made in 1913, shows a different interpretation and far greater volume of voice (022223).

GUIDO CICCOLINI first recorded in Milan in 1908. He made two records, arias from *Carmen* and *Mignon*, neither of which displaced the existing versions made by de Lucia for the same company. Of subsequent recordings, his 'Che gelida manina' (*Bohème*) is typical. (2-052082.) Another, 'Amor ti vieta' (*Fedora*), shows a very pleasant quality, but his penultimate note suggests that he was still anxious about his brothers (see p. 216). [7-52046.]

EDMOND CLEMENT, one of the finest lyric tenors that France has produced, began his recording career with the Odeon Company in 1906. Later he became a celebrity artist for the Victor-H.M.V. Company, for whom he made many

delightful discs, including excerpts from many of the lesser known operas. Mr. Phillips recommends

Victrola 6062 *Roi d'Ys*: 'Aubade' and *Manon*: 'Le rêve.' The following discs are still available, and do full justice to the artist:

H.M.V. DA211 *Dante* (Godard): 'Nous allons partir tous deux' (with FARRAR) and *Segreto di Susanna*: Solo by FARRAR.

H.M.V. DB172 *Romeo et Juliette*: 'Ange adorable' (with FARRAR) and *Mefistofele*: 'Lontano, lontano' (with FARRAR).

ARMAND CRABBÉ (*b.* 1883) began his recording career with the French branch of the H.M.V. Company. After the expiry of his H.M.V. contract, he made a series for the Decca Company. Typical of his art is

Decca T202 'La Jota' (Falla) and 'Rubia' (Armand Crabbé).*

The former is excellent, while the reverse side gives the listener an opportunity of assessing his merits as a composer.

ADA CROSSLEY (*b.* 1874) was a star artist in the first Victor celebrity list. Her discs are now extremely rare, especially the fine 81001 'Caro mio ben' (Giordani).

FRANCESCO DADDI recorded for many companies. His most interesting disc was

Columbia 10173 *Pagliacci*: 'O colombina' since he created the part of Beppe at the world première in Milan in 1892.

CHARLES DALMORES (1871–1939) shared with Clement, the French tenor, honours on the early Victor-H.M.V. lists. He specialized in the more robust operatic arias and his

032063 *Romeo et Juliette*: 'Cavatine'

is much prized. Only one record is still available, namely

H.M.V. DB638 *Carmen*: 'Là-bas dans la montagne' (with CALVÉ).

but one may still find two solos from the *Tales of Hoffmann* on H.M.V. DA157,* and I have heard a fine record of 'Ah si ben mio coll' essere' from *Il Trovatore*.

BEN DAVIES was the first British singer of note to make records. He made his first series in London in 1901. It consisted of the following (G. & T.):

2-2500 'Serenade' (Schubert).

- 2-2501 'Songs of Araby' (Clay).
2-2502 'My Pretty Jane' (Bishop).
2-2503 *Bohemian Girl*: 'When Other Lips.'
2-2504 'Tom Bowling' (Dibdin).

And, in 1902,

- 52329 *Faust*: 'Salve dimora'

attracted great attention and converted many other singers.
His 1903 group includes

- 2-2781 *Doris*: 'So Fare Thee Well.'

The best record still available is H.M.V. 02514 'To Mary' (M. V. White), and the Columbia Company have a number of titles made late in his career.

EDWARD DAVIES made a few titles in Welsh for the Zonophone Company. They have been off the list for many years.

HARRY DEARTH, the late (*b.* 1876), one of England's favourite bass-baritones, recorded in turn for most companies. Of the five discs remaining in the Columbia list, typical are DB299 'Bulls Won't Bellow' and 'Old Barty.'

- DX300 'The Sergeant of the Line' and 'The Drum-major.'

He possessed an enormous repertoire, and for more than a decade hardly a month passed without a record from him. Opera, oratorio, art song, and drawing-room ballad, all came alike to him.

EMMY DESTINN (*née* Kittl) (1878-1930) made three discs in 1904 for the Columbia Company. In the following year she transferred her allegiance to the Odeon Company in Berlin. In the years 1906-7 and 1908 she made a series for the Berlin studios of the Gramophone Company, and these discs are considered to be her best. They included recordings from Strauss's *Salomé*, and records of her greatest rôle, *Butterfly*. Later, many of her early titles were re-recorded in the London and New York studios, and the earlier issues vanished from the catalogues. Of her recordings still in the current catalogues, Mr. Phillips recommends:

- Parlophone PXO84 *Flying Dutchman*: 'Senta's ballad' and *Tristan und Isolde*: 'Liebestod.'

- H.M.V. DB233 *Gioconda*: 'Suicidio!' and *Tosca*: 'Vissi d'arte.'

My choice is H.M.V. DB647 *Madame Butterfly*: 'Un bel di vedremo' and Columbia A5399, two duets (with ZENATELLO).

ADAMO DIDUR, a Pole by birth, recorded most of the standard items from the Italian operatic bass repertoire for the Fonotipia Company. One is still available:

Parlophone PXO69 *Barbiere di Siviglia*: 'La calunnia.'

PAULINE DONALDA (*née* Lightstone) (*b.* 1884) made a few records for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company before ill health compelled her to retire. Her records consisted of arias from *Faust*, *Bohème*, *Don Giovanni* and *Pagliacci*, and songs by Wynne, Tosti, and Hahn. All are of high standard, and Mr. Phillips has an especial regard for

53520 *Don Giovanni*: 'Vedrai carino.'

All recordings are withdrawn, and are extremely rare.

HECTOR DUFRANNE recorded from 1904 onwards for the French branch of the Gramophone Company. His repertoire included many airs from lesser known operas, and he recorded some very fine excerpts from Adam's *Le Chalet*. He is well represented in the *Pelléas et Mélisande* series issued by Columbia.

LOUISE EDVINA, a pupil of Jean de Reszke, recorded for the H.M.V. Company. Her records have now all been withdrawn. All were good, and Mr. Phillips considers the following models of their kind:

H.M.V. 2-033071 *Louise*: 'Depuis le jour.'

H.M.V. 2-033072 'Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons' (Debussy).

H.M.V. 7-33038 *Thaïs*: 'L'amour est une vertu rare.'

GERALDINE FARRAR made her first records in Berlin shortly after her début at the Berlin Imperial Opera, in 1904. These included excerpts from *Manon*, *Traviata*, *Mignon*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Roland von Berlin*, etc., and are regarded highly by collectors.

More easily found are her numerous recordings for the Victor Company. Many of these are still available in the current H.M.V. catalogue, and the following are representative:

DB244 *Carmen*: 'Là-bas dans la montagne' and 'Séguedille.'

DB246 *Butterfly*: 'Un bel di' and *Tosca*: 'Vissi d'arte.'

2-033054 *Mignon*: 'Connais-tu le pays?'* (obbligato by FRITZ KREISLER).

KIRSTEN FLAGSTAD recorded years ago for the Odeon

Company, but copies of these discs are virtually unknown. She then recorded for the Swedish H.M.V., including the fine

H.M.V. X 'Saerjenten's Sunday' (Bull) and

2975 'Solveig's Song' (*Peer Gynt*).

When she achieved international status, she began a series of H.M.V. International Celebrity recordings. Selected examples are:

H.M.V. DB2746 *Tristan und Isolde*: 'Liebestod.'

H.M.V. DA1505 'Ich liebe dich' and 'Ein Traum' (Grieg).

H.M.V. DA1512 'Lullaby' (Scott) and 'O Lovely Night' (Ronald).

EVANGELINE FLORENCE recorded for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1902, making four titles. All were highly successful, but she did not repeat her experience.

3443 *Pearl of Brazil*: 'Thou Charming Bird' is regarded as her finest effort.

JOHN FORSELL, the baritone, was for years the 'trump card' of the Swedish branch of the Gramophone Company. His popularity in the Scandinavian countries was akin to that of Peter Dawson with the British and Australian publics. After a lengthy and successful career, he turned his talents to the management of the Stockholm Opera. He recorded most of the best known arias from the opera baritone repertoire, but his records were never made generally available outside Scandinavia.

IVOR FOSTER recorded for the Odeon Company. His records included:

Tannhäuser: 'O Star of Eve.' *Faust*: 'Even Bravest Heart.'

'Bedouin Love Song.' 'Rolling Down to Rio.'

Later he made a series for Columbia.

ALL FRANZ

HACE FRANZ made the majority of his recordings for the Pathé Company, but as these discs are not readily playable on modern machines, chief interest is centred round the few records that he made for H.M.V. His robust quality was ideally suited to Wagnerian opera, which he sang in French. Of his other records,

4-32274 *Samson et Dalila*: 'Arrêtez, o mes frères' * and

032227 *Romeo et Juliette*: 'Salut! Tombeau'
are typical.

032238 *Aida*: 'O celeste Aida' * is interesting both vocally and for the unorthodox manner in which the singer ends the aria.

EDOARDO GARBIN created many rôles in modern Italian opera, and recorded for the Fonotipia Company. On Parlophone PO125, in association with his wife, Adelina Stehle, he recorded the duet 'E dunque vero?' from *Adriana Lecourrueur*. Apart from the Fonotipia recordings, he recorded for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company—these discs are almost impossible to find—and for the Columbia Company. These last are less worth finding, as they were made long after Garbin's prime, and do not do him justice.

MARY GARDEN made a number of really important discs, including a series of Debussy songs, accompanied by the composer, and an excerpt from Alfano's neglected opera, *Resurrection*.

Some of the Debussy records have been reissued by the International Record Collectors' Club.

EVA GAUTHIER'S recordings were never issued in this country, but the International Record Collectors' Club issued an unusual coupling by this artist:

127 'Nina Boboh' (Malay and Javanese slumber song),
sung in Malay, and 'Le retour des promis' (Dessauer).

MARIA GAY, famous for her Carmen, was the wife of Zentello and discoverer of Lily Pons. She made a humble gramophone début in 1903 with two recordings for the French Gramophone & Typewriter Company. Few copies circulated, and she next appeared on discs for the Favorite Company. These, too, quickly disappeared. On her Covent Garden début in 1908, the Gramophone Company issued a series of excerpts from her most famous rôles—*Carmen*, *Samson*, and *Orfeo*. Later she recorded for Columbia and made some fine discs, including duets with her husband. One record of this series, A5279 *Carmen*: 'Habañera' and 'Card Song' is still available.

BENIAMINO GIGLI was given special leave from active service during the last war in order to appear at La Scala, Milan. H.M.V. took advantage of the opportunity to make his first recordings.

After the war he went to the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and was chosen by Caruso to deputise for him. Since then his fame has increased steadily. A large number of his records are in the current catalogue. Of his original series, H.M.V. 7-52220 'Serenata' * (Toselli) shows what he could do.

CHARLES GILIBERT (1867-1910) recorded for the Columbia and Victor Companies. Copies of his first (1903) Columbia records are seldom found nowadays, but four of his Victor titles are still available in the current H.M.V. catalogue:

DB274 *Serse*: 'Largo' (in French) and *Fair Maid of Perth*: 'Quand la flamme.'

DM117 *With MELBA*: 'Un ange est venu' (Bemberg) and 'Per valli, per boschi.'

DINH GILLY died early in 1940. He called in all his records, but can still be heard on H.M.V. DJ101 singing two Czech folk-songs with Emmy Destinn, 'My Homeland' and 'The Wedding.'

Of the cancelled records, the following are well worth picking up. Though imperfect, they show a noble voice:

H.M.V. 2-054062 'Dobrou noc' ma mila' (with DESTINN).*

H.M.V. DB743 *Madame Butterfly*: 'Amore o grillo' and 'Dovunque al mondo' (with HISLOP).*

DA559 *Il Tabarro*: 'Scorri fiume' and *La Bohème*: 'Vecchia zimarra.' A record of the Pagliacci Prologue in English (DB849), has its own interest.*

ALMA GLUCK (1884-1938) turned much of her talent to songs of a popular character, and enjoyed huge sales in consequence. Most of her records have been withdrawn, but the following representative example is still in the current H.M.V. catalogue:

DB574 'Angel's Serenade' (Braga) * and 'Ave Maria' (Gounod).

Each has an obbligato by her husband, Zimbalist.

Her voice was of exquisite quality. I recommend:

H.M.V. DB278 'O Sleep, why dost Thou Leave Me' and 'Angels Ever Bright and Fair' (Handel).*

H.M.V. DA240 'L'heure exquise' (Hahn).*

Victor 64213 'Bohemian Cradle Song' (Smetana).*

HARRY PLUNKET-GREENE made seven records for the Gramophone and Typewriter Company in 1904, six Irish

songs and a fine '*Abschied*' (Schubert). In the following year he added three more titles to the list. He gave up recording for some thirty years, then reappeared on Columbia with two very fine discs which are still available, Nos. DB1321 and DB1377. Of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company series I recommend GC3-2018, 'Father O'Flynn,'* which reveals the diction that made him famous. Of the later, 'Off to Philadelphia' is characteristic, but not always in tune. Perhaps the best is H.M.V. 3-2335, 'The Little Red Fox.'*

FREDERICK GRIEWOOD made his first record for H.M.V. in 1911, singing '*Ich grolle nicht*' (Schumann) and '*Der Wanderer*' (Schubert). Of the titles still purchasable I recommend:

Parlophone R1066 '*Turnnut Hoein*'* and
H.M.V. BD636 'The Berkshire Tragedy.'*

CAROLINE HATCHARD recorded for the now defunct Vocalion Company. Her discs are unobtainable.

WALTER HYDE began his recording career some thirty years ago for both the H.M.V. and Odeon Companies. 'Two of the finest examples of opera sung in English were his "Legend of Kleinsack" and "When Love is but Tender" from Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* (H.M.V. recordings),' says Mr. Phillips.

I recommend also:

D598 *Die Walküre*: 'Winter Storms have Waned.'*

JAMES JOYCE did not record as a singer, but made a special record of the concluding paragraphs of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle,' a part of *Finnegans Wake*.

GIUSEPPE KASCHMANN recorded a series of arias for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1903. Copies are very hard to find.

GIUSEPPE KRISMER made records for Fonotipia. I have his Prize Song from *Die Meistersinger*, in Italian. An Artiphone (Austrian) disc of the two tenor arias from Boito's *Mefistofele*, heard recently by Mr. Phillips, revealed a fine lyric tenor. He also made a fine 'Cielo e Mar' from *La Gioconda* for the same company.

FELIA LITVINNE sang at most of the world's great opera houses, but scored her greatest triumphs at the Paris Opera,

where she created many major rôles. She first recorded in 1903, when she made some eight titles for the Paris branch of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company. Cortot accompanied her. This series reveals adequately the variety of her repertoire, including excerpts from *Le Cid*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Tristan*, *Walküre*, *Sappho*, *Faust*, and songs by Rubinstein and Schumann. For the Fonotipia Company in 1905 she added arias from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Lohengrin*, *Aïda*, and *L'Africaine*. Her last series was for Odeon in 1907, the only new title was '*O mon Fernand*' (*Favorite*). None of her discs is now to be had, and specimens in the possession of private collectors are prized too highly to change hands.

FERNANDO DE LUCIA made a series of operatic numbers for the Gramophone and Typewriter Co. in 1903-4-5. He also specialized in the singing of folksongs. Many examples of his art are still available in the current H.M.V. catalogue. Of the others, his '*Il mio tesoro*' suffers by comparison with McCormack's, as de Lucia handicaps himself with a 10-inch disc.

I suggest the following:

H.M.V. DA335 '*Luna Lu.*' *

H.M.V. DA333 '*Oili oïldà.*' *

H.M.V. 2-52667 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: '*Se il mio nome.*' *

WILLIAM LUDWIG. This great baritone is rumoured to have made records, but we cannot trace them. His real name was Ledwidge. Sir Henry Wood has said of him that he was the greatest Elijah he ever heard: and he was tremendous in Wagnerian opera.

LOUISE KIRKBY LUNN recorded in 1901 for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company, and for the Columbia concern in 1903. It was not until nearly a decade later, however, that she began her long series of operatic and art song recordings for the Gramophone Company. They included:

2-033032 *Samson et Dalila*: '*Amour viens.*'

2-033030 *Carmen*: '*Card Song.*'

2-053075 *Rinaldo*: '*Lascia chio pianga.*'

2-033033 *Samson et Dalila*: '*Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix.*'

2-053068 *Clemenza di Tito*: '*Non piu.*'

2-053000 *Don Carlos*: '*O don fatale.*'

2-033031 *Samson et Dalila*: '*Printemps qui commence.*'

2-033028 *Carmen*: '*Seguidilla.*'

- 2-053067 *Trovatore*: 'Stride la vampa.'
- 2-053074 *Gioconda*: 'Voce di Donna.'
- 03257 *Faust*: 'When All was Young.'
- 2-054040 *Gioielli della Madonna*: 'T'eri un giorno'
(this last with MC CORMACK).

Apart from the last, all are withdrawn.

I recommend:

H.M.V. DB505 *Orfeo*: 'Che faro senza Eurydice.'

H.M.V. DB735 'The Land o' the Leal' (the reverse side
is very poor).

Particularly fine is 'Entreat Me not to Leave Thee'
(Gounod). I cannot, unfortunately, give the serial number.

BARTON McGUCKIN, stalwart of English opera over half a century ago, recorded for the Zonophone Company. One title has been traced:

42279 'Avenging and Bright.'

BLANCHE MARCHESI, daughter of MATHILDE, the famous singing teacher, recorded for the Gramophone Company in 1906, but the records were not issued in this country. A few years ago Mme Marchesi sponsored the private issue of these and new recordings. Despite the age of the recordings in the one case, and the age of the voice in the other, these discs are most interesting.

Mme MATHILDE MARCHESI did not record, but many of her pupils are mentioned in this Appendix, including Alma Gluck, Blanche Marchesi, Melba, and Nordica.

EMILIO DE MARCHI, creator of Cavaradossi in Puccini's *Tosca*, is rumoured to have recorded for the early Zonophone Company, but no discs or titles can be traced.

RICCARDO MARTIN recorded for the Victor Company. Outstanding titles are *Tosca*: *Elucevan le stelle*, Puccini, and *Als die alte mutter*, Dvorak.

GIOVANNI MARTINELLI has recorded for H.M.V. almost a hundred titles. A year ago, news filtered through from America that, with Jepson and Tibbett, he had recorded selected passages from his greatest triumph, *Otello*. Any of his titles in the current H.M.V. catalogue can be bought with confidence.

NELLIE MELBA unconsciously made her first records at the turn of the century, when Col. Mapleson, the impresario,

installed a recording phonograph in the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, and recorded many of the famous artists of the 'Golden Age' during actual performances. After many sessions the phonograph fell from its perch, high above the stage, and narrowly missed Melba's head. In 1904 she made a series of recordings for the Gramophone Company, which were not originally intended for commercial distribution. Outstanding in this group are

03020 *Lucia di Lammermoor*: 'Mad Scene.'

03025 *Rigoletto*: 'Caro nome.'

03028 *Nozze di Figaro*: 'Porgi amor.'

Until the day of her farewell performance at Covent Garden, Melba continued to record, making so many titles that choice must essentially be left to the taste of the individual. With McCormack and Sammarco, she recorded the trio finale to *Faust* and the quartet from *Rigoletto* (the latter is still available). Of the many titles in the current catalogue, her excerpts from *La Bohème* have perhaps the greatest appeal. I recommend also

2-053021 *Otello*: 'Ave Maria.' *

LAURITZ MELCHIOR, the Danish heroic tenor, made his first recordings for the Polydor Company of Germany, and later for Parlophone, for whom he recorded the Bridal Chamber scene from *Lohengrin*, with Emmy Bettendorf. After a brief session with the American Brunswick Company, he began recording for H.M.V., for whom he has recorded much of the essential Wagner tenor music.

CARMEN MELIS recorded in the early days for both the Gramophone & Typewriter Company and the Fonotipia Company, but her greatest work is the recording of *Tosca* (complete) in the current H.M.V. catalogue.

CLAUDIA MUZIO spent much of her gramophone career in recording for companies whose products are not readily playable on the gramophones of to-day. The exceptions were a fine 'Si, mi chiamano Mimì,' from *La Bohème*, which had a short life in the H.M.V. catalogues, and a few Actuelle recordings which were really transcriptions from her Pathé discs. During the few years before her death, she made a magnificent series of recordings for the Italian Columbia Company. A selection of these is available in the current Columbia catalogue, and Mr. Phillips recommends:

LX550 and 551 Otello-Desdemona duets (*with MERLI*).

LB40 *La Bohème*: 'Addio' and *Tosca*: 'Vissi d'arte.'

LX655 *Andrea Chénier*: 'La mamma morta' and *Traviata*: 'Addio del passato.'

LILIAN NORDICA made an interesting series for Columbia in 1906-10; the best, according to Mr. Phillips, is
30483 'Damon' (Strange) now withdrawn.

Of those still available he recommends:

74021 *Gioconda*: 'Suicidio!'

74022 Hunyadi Laszlos: aria.

MAURICE D'OISLY recorded for Columbia after the last war. His recorded repertoire consisted mainly of opera excerpts in English, including many fine duets with Rosina Buckman.

ROSA OLICKZKA made her first recordings for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1902. None of her discs are now available, but copies sometimes come to light of her Columbia recordings made in 1911-12, a series which included excerpts from *Gioconda*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Prophète*, *Cid*, *Orfeo*, and the Wagner operas.

JOSEPH O'MARA. Two early recordings by Joseph O'Mara have been traced, made for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company, London, 1901.

2-2062 'Friend and Lover' (Landon Ronald).

2-2567 *Shamus O'Brien*: 'Ochone! When I Used to be Young.'

DENIS O'SULLIVAN recorded for the Berliner Company and later the Gramophone & Typewriter Company. The latter series was made in London, 1901.

2-2556 'The Donovans.'

2-2591 'Irish Lullaby' (Stanford).

Of the Berliner records: 5644 'Believe Me if all Those Endearing Young Charms' (Moore), shows a distinctly operatic method.

ANGELICA PANDOLFINI made celebrity recordings for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1904, but these discs were not distributed outside Italy.

ANTONIO PAOLI made many records for H.M.V., all of which are withdrawn. His major work was a recording of the rôle of Canio in *Pagliacci* recorded under the direction of Leoncavallo, the composer.

ADELINA PATTI for some time fought shy of the gramophone, thereby wasting valuable years. When at last she succumbed, in December 1905, her voice had deteriorated badly. The records are interesting, however, and evidently pleased Patti, as she made others in the following year. By an irony of Fate, her finest recording, *La Calesera*, was far too brilliant for the gramophones of her time, and was, therefore, withdrawn. Of the titles still available, 03052 'Pur d'cesti' (Lotti) can be recommended.

POL PLANÇON was one of the first world celebrities to sing for the gramophone. He made in 1901 a series for the Zonophone Company, and these fabulously rare discs did justice to his voice, although they were very lightly recorded. In 1902 he began a series for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company and continued to record for them until his death. While they vary in quality, the titles in the current H.M.V. catalogue can all be recommended, especially the arias from *Die Zauberflöte*. Highly prized among collectors is his long withdrawn 'Au bruit des lourdes' from *Philémon et Baucis*.

The ease of his singing in 'Le Veau d'Or' from *Faust* (Gounod) is amazing. I recommend also:

DA340 'Devant la Maison' from Berlioz's *Faust*, and
032027 Gounod's *Nazareth*.

ROBERT RADFORD was a prolific maker of records. Pages of titles were for years the feature of H.M.V. and Zonophone catalogues. Although most of them are now withdrawn, many may be obtained from shops with second-hand record departments, as they enjoyed huge sales and copies are still plentiful.

Any one anxious to secure a record should look for these from the part of Sarastro in *The Magic Flute*. 'O Isis and Osiris' (Zonophone GO17) * is still to be bought, and compares well with the many other records of this aria.

MAURICE RENAUD made records for both the H.M.V. and Pathé Companies. Many considered his finest rôle was that of the Jester in *Rigoletto*, but no examples of him in this rôle were recorded. There are a few titles by him in the current H.M.V. catalogue.

Perhaps the best is D851 *Hérodiade: 'Vision fugitive.'** The aria from *Don Giovanni* on the reverse side is taken

rather slowly. A very early Gramophone & Typewriter record, GC2-2705, of the 'Toreador Song' from *Carmen*, with piano accompaniment, is sung with incredible ease and grace.*

JEAN DE RESZKE made recordings for both the H.M.V. and Fonotipia Companies, but in neither case would he permit their public release. Of the Fonotipia records, two titles are known:

69000 *Romeo et Juliette*: 'Scène du Tombeau.'

69001 *Le Cid*: 'O Souverain! ô Juge! ô Père!'

were recorded in 1905.

His voice can be heard only on the Mapleson cylinders (details under Melba) in excerpts from *L'Africaine* and *Siegfried*. These cylinders are primitive and of little musical value. On the better of them one can hear faintly the closing bars of 'O Paradiso.' These cylinders were rescued from oblivion and transcribed on discs by the International Record Collectors' Club of America. Inadequate as they may be, they must serve as souvenirs of de Reszke until such time as a trial pressing of his records for the commercial companies emerges.

ELISABETH RETHBERG first recorded for Brunswick. When she turned to the benefits of the later methods of recording by H.M.V. she made a number of discs.

The excerpts from *Aïda*, *Ballo in Maschera*, and *Otello* in the current catalogue are typical of her singing.

KENNERLEY RUMFORD began recording about 1910, his first disc being 'Thou'rt Passing Hence' (H.M.V. 02196). There are recordings of him singing with his wife, Dame Clara Butt, in the current H.M.V. and Columbia catalogues.

MARIO SAMMARCO is represented in the current catalogues by

Parlophone PXO90 *Rigoletto*: 'Pari siamo.'

This is a relic of his recording days with the Fonotipia Company. His series for H.M.V. has now entirely disappeared. This group, apart from many fine solo numbers, included the following duets with McCormack:

Il Barbiere: 'All' idea di quel metallo.*

La Bohème: 'O Mimi tu più non torni.*'

La Gioconda: 'O grido di quest' anima.'

SIR CHARLES SANTLEY recorded for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1903. The titles were:

- 2-2862 'Simon the Cellarer.'
- 2-2863 'The Vicar of Bray.'
- 2-2864 'To Anthea.'
- 02015 'Thou Art Passing Hence.'
- 052000 *Figaro*: 'Non piu andrai.'

Maud Santley recorded for the Pathé Company.

The first three titles are still available in the H.M.V. catalogue. 'Non piu andrai' is now one of the greatest rarities on discs. At about the age of eighty Santley decided to record again: this time for Columbia. The records are still available in the Columbia catalogue.

ERNESTINE SCHUMANN-HEINK recorded 1903 for the Columbia Company. These discs soon disappeared. In 1905 she began her long association with the Victor Company, and by 1907 had included all her Columbia titles in her Victor group. She continued to record for a quarter of a century. The following give some idea of her versatility:

- Victor 85093 'St. Paul' (Mendelssohn): 'But the Lord.'
- Victor 85096 'Lucrezia Borgia' (Donizetti): Brindisi.
- Victor 87013 'Tod und das Mädchen' (Schubert).
- Victor 88092 *Rheingold*: 'Weiche Wotan' (with WITHERSPOON).
- Victor 88139 Yodelling Air: 'I und mein Bua' (Millocker).
- H.M.V. DA525 'Sapphische Ode' and 'Wiegenlied' (Brahms).*

The only example left in the English catalogue is 'Ai nostri monti' (*Trovatore*), sung with Caruso on H.M.V. DK119.*

ANTONIO SCOTTI, the incomparable Scarpia, starred in the very first H.M.V. (Gramophone & Typewriter Company) celebrity list. During a decade of recording he did not make one poor disc. As with Sammarco, his solos have now entirely disappeared. These included excerpts from *Tosca*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Falstaff*, his greatest parts. The duets with Caruso in the current H.M.V. catalogue give a fair idea of his art. Of the solos, *Faust*: 'Mort de Valentin' (2-032001) * is a fine record.

ANDREAS DE SEGUROLA recorded for the Barcelona branch of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1903, and in 1907 started a long series for the Milan branch

of the same company. He later made a few titles for Columbia. He is represented in the current catalogues in the *Ballo in Maschera* ensembles on H.M.V. DM103 (with HEMPEL and CARUSO, etc.).

His Columbia titles, particularly *La Bohème*: 'Vecchia zimarra' and *Tales of Hoffmann*: 'Barcarole' (with DE PASQUALI), are worth getting.

MARCELLA SEMBRICH in 1903 made a series of recordings for the Columbia Company which were vocally fine but poor technically. In the following year she began to record for the Victor Company, for whom she made some fine recordings. All of her 1904 group are good, as are many of the later ones. The disc in the current catalogue which couples *Mignon*: 'Connais-tu le pays,' with *Faust*: 'Air des bijoux,' is of her best.

LENORA SPARKES made records for the Pathé Company. HORACE STEVENS made a number of excellent records for the Vocalian Company.

ROSINA STORCHIO was highly regarded by the composer Puccini, and created for him the rôle of Madame Butterfly.

She recorded for the Fonotipia Company, and one record has been reissued by the Parlophone Company, viz.:

PO121 *Don Pasquale*: 'Quel guardo' and 'So anch' io la virtu.'

FRANCESCO TAMAGNO began to record in 1903 and succeeded in conveying his histrionic, as well as his vocal, powers to the wax. Since he created the title rôle in Verdi's *Otello*, his recordings from that opera are of great importance. In spite of primitive recording conditions, his 'Death Scene' from that opera is more vivid than the many subsequent recordings by other singers. H.M.V. have retained these recordings in their catalogue, and despite doctoring of the matrices, modern pressings give some idea of his art.

Of the two recordings of the '*Morte d'Otello*,' the ten-inch (52674) is the better.*

RICHARD TAUBER has always recorded for the Parlophone-Odeon concern. In early days he specialised in opera and art songs, but in later years he has been more versatile. There is a Tauber disc in the Parlophone list to suit every taste.

Of the earlier records, the *Winterreise* cycle stands out and a record of *Marta*: ‘*Solo profugo*’ (with BENNO ZIEGLER), where Tauber’s phrasing is an astonishment. I recommend:

Parlophone R20063 ‘*Am Meer*’ (Schubert).*

MARION TELVA made no solo recordings, but can be heard on

H.M.V. DB1276 *Norma*: ‘*Mira, o Norma!*’ (with PONSELLÉ).

LUISA TETRAZZINI recorded five titles in 1903 for the Zonofono Company, all with pianoforte accompaniment by her brother-in-law, Cleofonte Campanini. This make of disc did not enjoy a wide circulation, and copies are few.

After her début at Covent Garden, in 1908, she made a number of recordings for H.M.V. Many are still available. Mr. Phillips recommends the arias from Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*.

MAGGIE TEYTE first recorded for the Gramophone and Typewriter Co. Next she recorded for Columbia. Some years later she made a few records for Decca, but apart from one disc of lesser known Offenbach, these too were of little musical interest. In recent years she has recorded two important albums: one of Debussy songs (accompanied by CORTOT), and an album of French songs by various composers.

JOHN CHARLES THOMAS made his first recordings for the Brunswick Company. He subsequently signed a contract with the Victor Company, for whom he re-recorded most of his Brunswick titles and added many new numbers. None of his discs have been issued in this country, but in America his ‘*Di Provenza*’ (*Traviata*) has enjoyed huge sales.

EDNA THORNTON recorded for the H.M.V. and Zonophone Companies. Collectors of oratorio and opera in English can, without difficulty, pick up specimens of her work.

LAWRENCE TIBBETT has always been an exclusive Victor and H.M.V. artist. From the current catalogue the following are recommended by Mr. Phillips:

DB1478 *Barbiere*: ‘*Largo al factotum*’ and *Ballo in Maschera*: ‘*Eri tu.*’

DB1684 ‘*Edward*’ (Loewe) and ‘*De Glory Road*’ (Wolfe).

EMMA TRENTINI made her first recordings for the Nicole Company, and subsequently for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company, and for Columbia. All have been long withdrawn. Her Columbia 30087 *Bohème*: '*Musetta's valse*', is very pleasing.

VANNI-MARCOUX succeeded the late Marcel Journet as France's leading bass, and has many titles to his credit in the French H.M.V. catalogue, but none of his discs is available in England.

GIANNINA WAYDA recorded for the Nicole Company. One title is known, an excerpt from *Lohengrin*, sung in Italian. Unfortunately, the Nicole Company's discs were of a somewhat flimsy construction, and few specimens have survived the years.

REINALD WERRENRATH recorded for the Victor Company for whom he made, apart from excellent solo recordings, many duet and ensemble titles with McCormack, Garrison, etc. He sings the part of Rigoletto in the quartet from that opera on H.M.V. DM104. With McCormack he sings 'The Lily of Killarney,' 'The Moon Hath Raised,' and Fauré: 'The Crucifix.'* (H.M.V. DA172). With Lambert Murphy, *Marta*: 'Solo profugo'*(Victor 31769).

CAROLINA WHITE made a short-lived series of records for Columbia. They seemed to attract little attention at the time of issue, but American collectors now prize them very highly.

PERCY WHITEHEAD. This polished baritone made a few records for H.M.V. The best of them is an excellent 'Eldorado' (Walthew), coupled with 'The Gentle Maiden' (arr. Somervell), B323.* Also worth getting are B351 'Last Year' (M. V. White)* and B352 'Back to Ireland' (Stanford).*

CLARENCE WHITEHILL made his first recordings for Zonophone just after the turn of the century. It was not until 1908, after his first Bayreuth experiences, that he began his career with the H.M.V.-Victor Companies. His very moving version of Wotan's farewell ('Die Walküre') is still available, H.M.V. DB440.

EVAN WILLIAMS made a great many records for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company and for H.M.V. Many titles are still available, including:

DB450 *Messiah*: 'Comfort Ye' and 'Every Valley.'

DB453 *Elixir of Love*: 'A Furtive Tear' and *Marta*:
'Like a Dream.'

I recommend, of the Gramophone & Typewriter Company records:

GC4-2008 'Sigh No More, Ladies' (Stevens).
of the H.M.V.:

02183 *La Bohème*: 'Your Tiny Hand is Frozen.*

5-2038 'Y Deryn pur' (Welsh folk-song).*

DB447 *Die Meistersinger*: 'Prize Song.*'

GIOVANNI ZENATELLO, during his lengthy career, recorded for most of the leading companies, beginning with the Italian Gramophone & Typewriter Company in 1903. Examples of his fine interpretation of the rôle of Otello are available in the Parlophone Historical series:

Others worth acquiring are:

Fonotipia G2204 *Mefistofele*: 'Giunto sull passo estremo'
and 'Dai campi, dai prati.'

Columbia A5359 *Otello*: 'Morte d'Otello' and *La Tosca*:
'E lucevan le stelle.'

H.M.V. DB1007 'Una Vela.'

H.M.V. DB1006, the duet from Act I (*with SPANI*), finds him far past his best, but the singing is clean and vigorous.

NICOLA ZEROLA made a few celebrity recordings for Victor-H.M.V. in 1909. His discs are now scarce. Mr. Phillips recommends the following:

H.M.V. 7-52008 *Ballo in Maschera*: 'Di tu se fedele.'

H.M.V. 7-52006 *Ballo in Maschera*: 'La rivedra nell' etasi.'

I add GC7-52006 *Otello*: 'Tu! Indietro! fuggi.' *

2-052019 *Otello*: 'Morte d'Otello.' *

APPENDIX B

THE following is a list, complete in so far as we can make it, of John McCormack's records of opera; songs in Italian, French, German, and Latin; Irish traditional songs; and a selection of songs in English.

OPERA (omitting titles re-recorded for H.M.V.)

- 84230 *La Favorita* (Donizetti): 'Spir'to gentil.'
- 84326 *Aïda* (Verdi): 'Celeste Aïda.'
- 57523 *Cavalleria Rusticana* (Mascagni): 'Siciliana.'
- 57524 *Pagliacci* (Leoncavallo): 'On with the Motley.'
- 57508 *Rigoletto* (Verdi): 'La donna e mobile.'
- 57525 *Tosca* (Puccini): 'E lucevan le stelle.'
- 57581 *Mignon* (Thomas): 'In Her Simplicity.'

SONGS in Italian

- 84206 'Pianto del core' (Pinsuti).
- 84217 'Lolita' (Buzzi-Peccia).
- 57643 'Voi dormite, Signora' (Tosti).
- 57633 'Mattinata' (Leoncavallo).
- 57642 'Ideale' (Tosti).
- 57645 'L'ultima canzone' (Tosti).

IRISH TRADITIONAL SONGS. (This list is incomplete, and I can give the numbers of only a few titles.)

- 57646 'Oft in the Stilly Night.'
- 'Believe Me if all those Endearing Young Charms.'
- 0469 'Trottin' to the Fair' (arr. Stanford).
- 'The Foggy Dew.'
- 'Avenging and Bright.'
- 44852 'Savourneen Declish.'
- 'A Nation Once Again.'

'The Boys of Wexford.'
'The Croppy Boy.'
'God Save Ireland.'
'The Dear Little Shamrock.'
'Eileen Aroon.'

H.M.V. RECORDS: OPERA

- DA 297 *Manon* (Massenet): 'Chiudo gli occhi.'
DA 307 *Bohemian Girl* (Balfe): 'Then You'll Remember Me.'
DA 336 *Maritana* (Wallace): 'There is a Flower.'
DA 379 *Lakmé* (Delibes): 'Vieni al contento' and *La Bohème* (Puccini): 'Soave fanciulla' (with BORI).
DA 498 *Mefistofele* (Boito): 'Dai campi, dai prati' and *Rigoletto* (Verdi): 'Questa o quella.'
DA 502 *Pescatori di perle* (Bizet): 'Mi par d'udir ancora.'
DA 946 *Fortunio* (Messager): 'La maison grise.'
DB 324 *Don Giovanni* (Mozart): 'Il mio tesoro' and *Elisir d'amore* (Donizetti): 'Una furtiva lagrima.'
DB 329 *Mastersinger* (Wagner): 'Prize Song.'
DB 343 *La Bohème* (Puccini): 'Che gelida manina' and *Carmen* (Bizet): 'Il fior che avevi a me.'
DB 345 *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Donizetti): 'Fra poco a me ricovero' and 'Tu, che a Dio spiegasti l'ali.'
DB 579 With MARSH. *Aïda*: 'O terra addio' and *Carmen*: 'Parle-moi de ma mère.'
DB 608 With SAMMARCO. *Barbiere*: 'All' idea' and *Gioconda*: 'Grido di quest' anima.'
DB 630 With SAMMARCO. *La Bohème*: 'Ah Mimi, tu piu.'
DB 631 *Traviata* (Verdi): 'De' miei bollenti spiriti' and *Figlia del Reggimento*: 'Per viver vicino.'
DB 634 *Joseph* (Mehul): 'Champs paternels' and *Faust* (Gounod): 'Salve dimora.'
DB 2867 *Semele* (Handel): 'Where'er you Walk.'
DK 123 With LUNN. *Gioielli della Madonna*: 'T'eri un giorno.'
DM 104 *Rigoletto*: quartet with BORI, JACOBY, and WERRENRATH, and *Traviata*: 'Parigi, o cara' (with BORI).
DM 118 *Rigoletto*: quartet with MELBA, SAMMARCO, and THORNTON.

VICTOR RECORDS: OPERA

- 74295 *Natoma* (Herbert): 'Paul's Address.'
87553 *Pescatori di Perle* (with SAMMARCO): 'Del tempio.'
749 *Semele* (Handel): 'O Sleep, why dost Thou Leave Me?'
923 *Mefistofele* (Boito): 'Giunto sul passo estremo.'

VICTOR PRESSINGS for the INTERNATIONAL RECORD COLLECTORS' CLUB

- 7 *Faust*: Final trio (with MELBA and SAMMARCO).
60 *Atalanta* (Handel): 'Come, Beloved.'
96 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: 'Numero quindici' (with SAMMARCO).

H.M.V. RECORDS: SONGS in German

- DA 628 Brahms: 'In Waldseinsamkeit' and 'Die Mai-nacht.'
DA 635 Brahms: 'Komm bald' and 'Feldeinsamkeit.'
DB 766 Schubert: 'Du bist die Ruh' and Wolf: 'Wo find' ich Trost.'
DA 932 R. Strauss: 'Du meines Herzens Krönelein' and 'Allerseelen.'
DA 933 Schubert: 'Die Liebe hat gelogen.'
DA 1170 Wolf: 'Anakreons Grab' and 'Schlafendes Jesuskind.'
DA 1441 Wolf: 'Auch kleine Dinge können' and 'Herr, was trägt der Boden hier.'
DB 1830 Wolf: 'Ganymed' and 'Beherzigung.'
DB 2868 Wagner: 'Träum' and Wolf: 'Schlafendes Jesuskind.'

VICTOR RECORDS: SONG in German

- 1272 *Minnelied* (traditional).

H.M.V. RECORDS: SONGS in Italian

- DA 297 Bimboni: 'Sospiri miei, andante ove mi mando.
DK 123 Rossini: 'Mira la bianca luna' (with DESTINN).
DA 627 Donaudy: 'Luoghi sereni e cari' and 'O del mio amato ben.'
DB 2867 Handel: 'Caro amore.'

VICTOR RECORDS: SONGS in Italian

- 87078 Rossini: '*La Marinari*' (*with SAMMARCO*).
1081 Lotti: '*Pur d'cesti*.'
- 1288 Donaudy: '*Luoghi sereni e cari*'

VICTOR PRESSING for the INTERNATIONAL RECORD COLLECTORS' CLUB

- 60 Mozart: '*Ridente la calma*'

H.M.V. RECORDS: SONG in Latin

- DB1095 Franck: '*Panis Angelicus*'

H.M.V. RECORDS: SONGS in English

- DA 456 Rachmaninov: 'O, Cease Thy Singing' and
'When Night Descends' (*violin obbligato by KREISLER*).
DA 458 Schubert: 'Serenade' (*violin obbligato by KREISLER*).
DA 680 Rachmaninov: 'To the Children' and 'How Fair
this Spot.'
DA 933 Schubert: 'Who is Sylvia.'
DA1111 Quilter: 'Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal.'
DA1112 Tschaikowsky: 'None but the Weary Heart' and
DA1286 Elgar: 'Is she not passing Fair.'
DB1297 Schubert: '*Ave Maria*' and 'Serenade.'

H.V.M. RECORDS: SONGS in French

- DA1286 Fauré: '*Automne*'
DB 984 Fauré: '*Les rameaux*'

VICTOR RECORDS: SONG in French

- 2-052111 Leroux: '*Le nil*' (*obbligato by KREISLER*).

IRISH TRADITIONAL SONGS. (Omitting the first series
made in 1906.)

- DA 306 'Believe Me if all those Endearing Young Charms'
and 'The Harp that Once through Tara's
Halls' (Moore).
DA 295 'The Minstrel Boy' (Moore) and 'The Foggy
Dew' (arr. Fox).
03206 'Has Sorrow Thy Young Days Shaded' (Moore).
02286 'Molly Bawn' (Lover).

- DB 344 'The Snowy-Breasted Pearl' (*arr.* Robinson).
4-2366 'The Low-backed Car' (Lover).
DA 636 'I Saw from the Beach' (Moore) and 'Padraic the Fiddler' (*arr.* Larchet).
DB 327 'The Irish Emigrant' and 'She is Far from the Land' (Lambert).
4-2379 'Molly Brannigan' (*arr.* Stanford).
GC4-2073 'My Lagan Love' (*arr.* Hamilton Harty).
DA1771 'The Garden where the Praties Grow' (*arr.* Liddle) and 'The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls' (Moore).
DA1396 'Terence's Farewell to Kathleen' (Dufferin) and 'The Dawning of the Day' (*arr.* Page).
4-2213 'Wearin' o' the Green.'
DA 1119 'The Rose of Tralee' (*arr.* Glover).
DA 1718 'The Star of the County Down' (*arr.* Hughes).
DA1752 'The Meeting of the Waters' (Moore, *arr.* Hughes), 'The Bard of Armagh' (*arr.* Hughes), and
DA1234 'By the Short Cut to the Rosses' (*arr.* Fox).

These lists omit over a hundred recordings of a more popular type of music.

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